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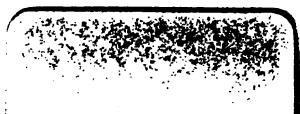
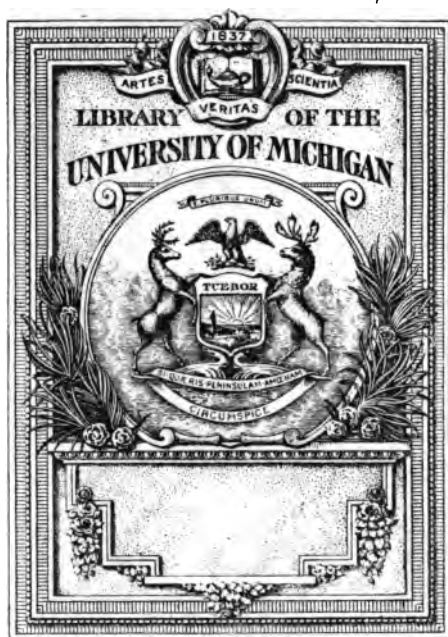
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CHIEFLY ON POETRY

BY

AUBREY DE VERE, LL.D.

IN TWO VOLS.

VOL. I

CRITICISMS ON CERTAIN POETS

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1887

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TO THE MEMORY OF
CHAUCER,
THE FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY,
THESE ESSAYS
ON THE WORKS OF A FEW AMONGST HIS SONS
ARE DEDICATED
IN THE BELIEF THAT

"We live by admiration, hope, and love,
And even as these are well and wisely fixed
In dignity of being we ascend."¹

¹ Wordsworth.

poet of beauty; but he sought that beauty in the human relations even more than in that world of ideal thought which was his native land. This truth seems little recognised, and is yet momentous if we would understand Spenser. Spenser was a great thinker, but he seldom writes in a speculative vein; and deep and sound as was his best philosophy, he knew that poetry must express it in a strain "simple, sensuous, and impassioned," or not at all. No one was more familiar with forest scenery, or with the charm of mead and meadow and river-bank; but he left it for poets of a later age to find in natural description the chief sphere for the exercise of their faculties. He lived too near the chivalrous age of action and passion to find in aught, save man, the chief subject for the exercise of his genius. He stood between those ages in which knightly deeds had shared with spiritual contemplation the reverence of mankind, and that later age in which activities yet more intense, but less nobly balanced, addressed themselves to political ambitions, to polemical controversies, to the discovery and the ruthless subjugation of unfortunate races discovered, only to be degraded. In its newly awakened energies he took an interest. He had given instruction to statesmen, and he had listened to Raleigh when the "shepherd of the ocean" sat beside him at Kilcolman Castle, and narrated his adventures in the Western Wonderland. But there were enterprises that interested him more than these; and in them what he valued most

was the emblematic illustration of human nature. That world which, as it receded, kissed hands to him alone, had for him more charm than the world that proffered her ungarnered spoils to the new settlers. The clarion voice from fields where the knights of old had sought honour only, was more to him than the clamours of sectarian dispute, or the clash of swords directed by that Macchiavellian policy which in nearly all countries had taken the place of mediæval statesmanship. And thus the first poet of the new era was yet more emphatically the last poet of the old—at once the morning star of England's later, and the evening star of her earlier literature. The associate of Leicester and Burleigh and Essex sang of Paladins in whom they had no belief, and embodied Virtues in which they had no part. He kept his higher genius for the celebration of a wonder-world gone by. That world, too, was a world of men and women; but those among them in whom the poet intended us to be interested were by necessity beings over whom the "Ages of Faith" had cast a spiritual gleam. It was humanity that Spenser sang in the main, but it was an ideal humanity. By some this will be regarded as dispraise, and supposed to imply a charge of unreality. Spenser might have retorted that charge. He saw habitually in humanity, notwithstanding the Fall, the remains of its "original brightness"; and for him the unreality would have consisted in hiding what he saw. He saw, resting on the whole of God's creation, a remnant of the Divine beauty, impressed upon it from

the Face of Him who, when it came from His hand, had pronounced it "very good"; and what he saw as a man, he confessed as a poet. He "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," though he sometimes gazed on vulgar prosperities "with a dazzled eye."

There are—and we are bound not to conceal the fact—serious blots upon Spenser's poetry, but these are obviously unhappy inconsistencies when compared with its immense merits, moral as well as imaginative; nor is there any poet in whom it is more easy to discriminate between the evil which is accidental, and the good which is essential. Where Spenser is himself, the greatness of his ideal hangs around his poetry like the halo round the head of a saint. His poetry has that gift without which all others, including even that of imagination itself, leaves it but a maimed and truncated thing—a torso without a head. It has a soul. In this respect Spenser was as like Tasso as he was unlike Ariosto, whom he too often imitated, but from whom he derived little save harm. It is noteworthy that Shelley, who admired Spenser almost as much as Wordsworth and Southey did, expressed himself in disparaging terms of Ariosto; while Byron, who was a great reader of Ariosto, gave back the volumes of Spenser which Leigh Hunt had urged him to peruse, with no remark except, "I can make nothing of him."

The magnificent ideal design on which Spenser founded his *Faery Queen* was one which dedicated itself pre-eminently to the exaltation of humanity. ✓ His

aim was "to strengthen man by his own mind"; teaching him to submit that mind and its labours to the regimen of those twelve great Virtues which, according to the teaching of antiquity, preside like tutelary guardians over all social polities. Thus to vanquish all evil by simply making Virtue meet Wrong face to face, and strike it down—the great idea at the heart of chivalry—was a noble conception.

Such a poem could never have been conceived by one who had been rendered indifferent to human interests through an exclusive devotion to ideal Beauty or abstract Truth. Embodied Vices are but abstractions, and do not constitute human characters, because the Vices are themselves but accidents of human nature when disnatured. It is otherwise with the Virtues: they belong to the essence of human nature; and in a large measure they create by the predominance now of this virtue, now of that, the different types of human character, each type drawing to itself by a gradual accretion the subordinate qualities most in harmony with that fundamental virtue. A true poet's knowledge of human character is thus in a large measure the result of a moral insight which sees both its intellectual and practical development enclosed within their moral germ, like the tree within the seed: though it is by a very different faculty—viz. observation—that he is enabled to realise his knowledge and delineate that character. Where the conception of character is a true one, that truthfulness stands attested by its consistency, the

different qualities which compose that character coalescing into a perfect whole, alike when they possess an obvious resemblance to each other, and when, though unlike, they are supplemental to each other. Let us illustrate this by three of Spenser's favourite characters. Belpheobe is his great type of Purity, as her twin sister Amoret is of Love. Britomart is as eminently a type of Purity as Belpheobe, but notwithstanding, she is an essentially different character; and while Belpheobe glides like a quivered Dian through the forests, and sends shaft on shaft after the flying deer, Britomart cannot be contented except when she rides forth on heroic enterprise. Amoret, Belpheobe's sister, is equally unlike both: she can love only, love always, endure all things for love, and love but one. The woodland sport and the war field are alike alien to her. Britomart, who unites both those sister types of character, loves as ardently as Amoret, but she cannot, like her, love only; her life must be a life of arduous action and sustained endeavour, and while these are with her she is contented alike in the presence or absence of her lover. The reason of this heart-freedom in the midst of heart-thralldom is that Britomart is predominantly a being of Imagination. She falls in love with Artegall before she has ever met him, having but seen a vision of him in Merlin's magic glass (Book III. canto ii. stanza 24). For a time she pines away, but strength and gladness return to her in the midst of heroic achievement. At last she meets Artegall jousting

amid the other knights: she does not recognise him, but engages with him in fight and wins the victory (Book IV. canto iv.) Here there is a clear conception of character, and if that conception is not appreciated the fault is with the reader, not the poet. He had himself interpreted Britomart, and her unintended victory—

Unlucky mayd to seek him far and wide,
Whom, when he was unto herself most nie,
She through his late disguisement could him not descrie !

It is long before Belphebe can be brought to return her lover's affection. Neither her heart nor her Imagination stands in need of love. The woodland ways suffice for her; and when she loves, her love is chiefly compassion. This is true to human nature: such boundless activities as Belphebe rejoiced in are the aptest type of that redundant vitality, both moral and material, which suffices for itself, which can spend its energies for ever without a return, and which needs no other support than its own inherent strength and wavelike elasticity.

This triple delineation of character is not the less lifelike because it is intended to imply a philosophic truth—viz. that the highest purity is capable of engendering the most passionate devotion; and that an affection at once the most devoted and the most ideal is one which intensifies, not weakens, the active powers.

We need go no farther than the first book of the *Faery Queen* for a proof that Spenser could illustrate

human nature as well as allegorise the Passions ; for its heroine, Una, is one of the noblest contributions which poetry, whether of ancient or modern times, has made to its great picture gallery of character. As long as Homer's Andromache and Nausicaa, Chaucer's Cecilia, Griselda, and Constance, the Imogen of Shakespeare, or the Beatrice of Dante, are remembered, so long will Una hold her place among them. One of the most noteworthy things in this character is the circumstance that so few elements suffice to invest it with an entire completeness. What are those elements? Truth, Reverence, Tenderness, Humility. It is that conception of character, at once Christian and womanly, which belongs to the earlier Italian poetry more than to that of other nations, or of those later times in which the woman is so often lost in the Goddess or the Syren. Una's life is spent in the discharge of one great duty—the deliverance of her parents from thrall. In her simplicity she reposes an entire trust in the youthful knight who, at Queen Gloriana's command, has undertaken the enterprise, and with whom she travels alone through wood and wild, gladly repaying his love with hers, but never shaken in her devotion to her parents far away. He forsakes her, persuaded through the spells of the enchanter Archimago that she is false. She wonders, and she mourns ; but the wound of an insulted love is not exasperated by self-love, and therefore it heals. She is too humble to be humiliated ; and when she learns that he has fallen under the thralldom of the

wicked witch Duessa, she roams over the world in the hope of delivering him who had vowed to be her deliverer. The milk-white lamb which she "led in a line" as she rode, and the lion which emerged from the woods to become her protector, may have suggested the lines in which Wordsworth illustrates the chivalrous age—

The lamb is couchant at the lion's side ;
And near the flame-eyed eagle sits the dove.

The purity of Una, unlike that of Belphebe or Britomart, has culminated in sanctity, and is symbolised by that veil, on the rare removal of which her face sends forth a divine radiance. It is this sanctity which overawes the merry wood-gods ; nor can it be regarded as less than a serious blemish in the poem that the same high spell should not have overawed all besides.

They, in compassion of her tender youth,
And wonder of her beautie soverayne,
Are wonne with pittie and unwonted ruth ;
And all prostrāte upon the lowly playne,
Doe kiss her feete, and fawne on her with countenance fayne.

Their harts she guesseth by their humble guise,
And yields her to extremity of time :
So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
And walketh forth without suspect of crime ;
They all as glad as birdes of joyous pryme,
Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
Shouting and singing all a shepherds ryme,
And with green branches strewing all the ground,
Do worship her as queen with olive garland crowned.¹

¹ Book I. canto vi. stanza 13.

Una is as brave as she is meek ; and it is her timely courage that delivers her knight after his restoration to her. When he is on the point of yielding to the spells of Despair, that most powerful of all Spenser's impersonations, at the moment when

his hand did quake,
And tremble, like a leaf of aspen greene,
And troubled blood through his pale face was seen
To come and go with tidings from the heart,
As it a running messenger had been,

she snatches the dagger from his hand, and breaks the enchantment. She leads him to the House of Holiness, where, by goodly discipline, as well as a fuller initiation into the Faith, the knight is rendered fit for his great enterprise ; and she does not shrink from a spiritual penance greater than his—

His own deere Una hearing evermore
His rueful shriekes and gronings, often tore
Her guiltless garments and her golden heare,
For pittie of his payne and anguish sore ;
Yet all with patience wisely did she beare,
For well she wist his cryme could els be never cleere.

He slays the dragon ; in the palace of Una's rescued parents the wedding-feast is held ; and when she, the emblem of Truth in its sacred unity,

had layd her mourneful stole aside,
And widow-like sad wimple throwne away,
Wherewith her heavenly beautie she did hide,

the radiance then revealed is such that even the Red-Cross Knight

Did wonder much at her celestial sight ;
Oft had he seene her faire, but never so faire bright.

If this be ideal poetry, it owes notwithstanding half its pathos to its reality. To claim for the poet of Faery Land the title of a poet of the humanities is not, of course, to make that claim for him in the same sense as it is to be made for Chaucer, who had a more vivid knowledge of character as character is learned from life, and a keener relish for all that gives animation to life. Still less can such a comparison be made between Spenser and Shakespeare, that "myriad-minded man" to whom human character, with all its varieties, harmonies, and contrasts, presented an ever-changing world of impassioned interest, over and above its moral significance, and one on which his mind rested as the eye of a great painter rests on the passions of a sky shaken by thunderstorm. But far more than any of the Italian poets, the French, or the English, he fixed his gaze steadily on the fair countenance of humanity. No doubt that humanity was not, like Homer's, humanity as it came from the hand of Nature. It was one which, though not conventionalised by the fashions of modern times, yet was seen through the coloured mists of a chivalric imagination. Even the most poetic costume is costume still; but the romances of chivalry which Ariosto, the poet of a land in which chivalry never flourished, had read in a spirit of mockery, were realities to the great northern poet, and his sympathy with them imparted reality to that poem which reproduced and transfigured them.

It may be well to advert to another opinion often

put forward respecting Spenser, but which is more specious on the surface than in the depths, and requires for its correction the statement of a converse truth, and one more important. Spenser has been claimed by many as in England the firstfruits of the "Renaissance." An important distinction is here to be made. He was a man of the Renaissance, but he was in the main a poet of the "olden time." He lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but his genius lived, even more decisively than that of Chaucer, in the days of Queen Philippa, and was familiar with many a lonelier nook in the woodlands of Woodstock than the earlier poet, the singer of its white-thorns and daisies, had made himself familiar with. His heart was not with Raleigh or Leicester when he sang thus—

O goodly usage of those antique tymes,
In which the sword was servaunt unto right ;
When not for malice and contentious crymes,
But all for prayse, and prooffe of manly might,
The martiall brood accustomed to fight :
Then honour was the meed of victory,
And yet the vanquishèd had no despight.¹

It was not for its picturesque aspects only, but its moral import, that Spenser loved chivalry—

O goodly golden chayne, wherewith yfere
The vertues linkèd are in lovely wise ;
And noble mindes of yore allyed were
In brave poursuit of chevalrous emprise,
That none did others' saféty despize,
Nor aid envy to him in need that stands,
But friendly each did others praise devise.²

¹ Book III. canto i. stanza 13.

² Book I. canto ix. stanza 1.

The same tribute is paid in Book IV. canto viii. stanza 30 *et seq.*—

But antique age yet in the infancy
Of tyme did live then like an innocent,
In simple truth and blameless chastitie,
Ne then of guile had made experiment ;
But voide of vile and treacherous intent,
Held vertue for herself in soveraine awe :
Then loyall love had royal regiment.

So again in Book V. canto xi. stanza 56—

Knights ought be true ; and truth is one in all :
Of all things to dissemble foully may befall.

Absolutely unlike that of the Renaissance was Spenser's idea of Woman. In it Womanhood was not condemned to have her portion either in the torrid zone or the arctic zone of human character—amid the burning sands roamed over by ravening passions, or in the flowerless region of a frigid scientific intelligence. It bloomed in the temperate region of serene affections, lighted by the sun of Christian faith, and freshened by the airs of human sympathy.

Such were the characters to which Spenser's genius attached itself—that genius to which we owe all that we love and remember in his works. He wrote complimentary verses to the age, and its favourites, besides ; but it is not by such that he is to be estimated. In such he takes place with his neighbours. (If, in comparing man with man, we measure their heights by their ankles, not their heads, there is little to choose between them. St. Bernard and the Crusaders lived on in Spenser's true poetry. He himself lived much

with men of a very different sort, till a fortunate exile set him free ; and in some part he followed their ways. In his political views he must have imbibed from a ruthless time, and reckless associates, a spirit wholly alien from his own benign and sympathetic nature, or in his sagacious but pitiless state-paper on Ireland he would not have recommended courses as unrelenting as those which later drove him from his blazing home. It was, doubtless, also from a time in which controversial weapons were brandished in and out of place, that he learned to sour his youthful pastorals by declamations against the shepherds on the margin of the Tyber, though at a maturer age he admitted that the English monasteries, and many a roofless church, had suffered wrong from the "Blatant Beast," Calumny—

From thence into the sacred church he broke,
And robbed the chancell, and the deskes down threw,
And altars foulèd, and blasphem̃y spoke,
And the images, for all their goodly hew,
Did cast to ground, whilest none was them to rew.¹

Neither did he wholly escape the lowering influences of a political time when despotic princes and their favourites were worshipped. That worship, which in many proceeded from obsequious self-interest, was probably in Spenser little more than an imaginative prodigality of the loyal instinct bequeathed by past ages, but attaching itself, for want of a better investment, to objects they would not have revered. Life, political and civil, "in all its equipage," was to him a

¹ Book V. canto x. stanza 25.

splendid pageant, and seeing behind all things the goodly "idea" which they symbolised, a royal court must have appeared in his eyes "the great School-maistresse of all Courtesy," and as such to be venerated. He was not one to waste a life climbing official palace stairs; but he spent on such dreary pastimes time sufficient to have produced several books of his immortal poem; and the memorial of that time remains in the well-known lines—

Full little know'st thou that hast not tried,
What hell it is, etc.

In one respect, however, it must be admitted that the Renaissance had assisted Spenser: it had imparted to him an acquaintance with classical, and especially with mythological lore, such as no mediæval writer possessed. His own profound sense of beauty made him fully appreciate what was thus presented to him; and whereas mediæval writers had often dealt with antiquity as mediæval painters had done, placing the head of a saint upon the neck of a Hebe or a Mars, he entered into its spirit in an ampler manner than any of his predecessors, or any southern poet had done. He had learned much from ancient philosophy, especially that of the Academy, to which his poetry was indebted for the great Platonic "ideas," a swan-flight of which is always floating over his meads and vales, and for those lofty aspirations which are the sustaining spirit of his poetry. The degree in which the sixteenth century was animated by new discoveries, political changes, and intellectual controversies, must

also have had an awakening effect on his genius. But they also, and in a lamentable degree, drew that genius aside from what would have been its natural walk. In the *Divina Commedia* the middle ages had bequeathed to all time, not an epic, as it has sometimes been called, but a mystical poem, incomparably the highest flight of poetry since the volume of the Hebrew prophets was closed. The great romantic poem of the middle ages was never written, and the opportunity is lost. Spenser was the man to have written it; but even if the *Faery Queen* had been finished, it would not have wholly proved that work. It contains much that belongs to such a theme: it includes much that is alien to it: and—a matter yet more to be regretted—it misses much that is essential to it. Spenser lived near enough to the middle ages to have understood them in a more profoundly sympathetic way than is possible to us. His imagination and his affections followed the mediæval type. All that he saw was to him the emblem of things unseen; the material world thus became the sacrament of a spiritual world, and the earthly life a betrothal to a life beyond the grave. Spenser's moral being was also to a large extent mediæval in character, notwithstanding the sectarian teaching he had imbibed in youth. Had he been a mediæval poet, he would have given us on a large scale such illustrations of things spiritual, seen from the poetic point of view, as Chaucer's enchanting "Legend of St. Cecilia" has given us in a fragmentary form. In the early chronicles he would also have

found large materials; for even the minuter events of the middle ages must have then retained a significance lost for us. Still more full of meaning must the chivalrous romances have then been. He would have selected and combined their treasures, and become their great poetic representative, as Homer was the representative of numberless bards whose minstrelsy had delighted the youth of Greece. Spenser would there, too, have found a far ampler field for that unconscious symbolism which belongs to high poetry, and especially to his; and he would not have been driven upon those artificial allegories which chill many a page of his verse. Symbols and allegories, though often confounded, are things wholly different in character. [Symbols have a real, and allegories but an arbitrary existence. All things beautiful and excellent are symbols of an excellence analogous to them, but ranged higher in Nature's scale. Allegories are abstractions of the understanding and fancy; and it is the especial function of imagination and passion, not by any means to pass by deep thoughts, which are their most strengthening nourishment, but to take them out of the region of the abstract, which is that of science, not of poetry, and present them to our sympathies in the form of the concrete, investing them with life—its breath, its blood, and its motion.

It was for the human side of a great mediæval theme that Spenser's characteristics would have pre-eminently qualified him, as it was the supernatural side that challenged most the genius of Dante. (He

had a special gift for illustrating the offices and relationships of social life.) For such illustration his age was unsuited. The world was passing through one of those transitional periods, so irregular in their nature, and made up of elements so imperfectly combined, that a picture of national life and the civilisation of an epoch, attempted while the confusion lasts, must needs be deficient in harmony. The world has other periods in which society has adjusted itself, and blended its elements into a consistent whole ; in which the kaleidoscope has been turned round until it has reached that point at which its contents emerge from disorder, and fling themselves into a pattern ; and to such a period we may ourselves be on our way. One of these periods was that sung by Homer : in it the best characters, and the worst, had a something in common ; and hence the admirable consistency of that social picture presented by him. Another such period was exemplified by the middle ages, which, abundant as they were in extremes of good and of evil, held notwithstanding certain common characteristics admitted alike by those who designate them the "Ages of Faith," and those who call them "the dark ages." Spenser's poem would doubtless have illustrated both the evil and the good in them, but there would have been more light than gloom in his picture. His *Faery Queen's* magnificent aim—that of setting forth those great Virtues which are in fact so many great Truths embodied in corresponding affections—would have thus been harmoniously real-

ised. That beauty, which ever haunted Spenser's mind, would in such a theme have shone forth as a thing inherent in the conditions of all true social existence even here below. Whatever is majestic in age, grave in authority, joyous and bright in boyhood or maidenhood, devout and lovely in childhood, excellent in the life wedded or unwedded, active or contemplative, would have been found by him amid the rich variety of mediæval society amply developed and harmonised, though not without sad contrasts of shortcoming and wrong. Such a picture would have been to the world "a possession for ever."

The age in which Spenser lived was one full of what may be called anachronisms, so inconsistently did it bring together what it had inherited; and what it had produced and was producing. This luckless incoherency could not but reflect itself in his poetry. Let us take an example. In the "Legend of Artegall or Justice" (Book V. canto ix.) we are brought to the Palace of Mercilla. It is magnificently described as the Temple of Justice: we make our way to the throne on which Mercilla sits, described so nobly that we cannot doubt that she is herself the goddess who holds the scales of justice in this lower world. Nothing can be subtler than the symbolism, more splendid than the imagery, more skilful than the mode in which the solemn process is carried on before that high tribunal. It is no more than right that the warder who sits at the gate of this palace should be "Awe"—

To keep out guyle, and malice, and despight;

that the great marshal in the central hall should be "Order"; that the cloth of gold which hangs "like a cloud" above the head of the goddess, and

Whose skirts were bordered with bright sunny beames,
Glistering like gold amongst the plights enrold,
And here and there shooting forth silver streames,

should be sustained in the hands of angels; and that at the foot of the throne should be placed

Just Dicé, wise Eunomie, myld Eirene;
And sacred Reverence yborne of heavenly strene.

✓ The greater is our disappointment when it turns out that though the days described are those of the "Round Table," the Goddess of Justice is the daughter of Anne Boleyn, and that the queenly lady "of great countenance and place" who stands at her bar for judgment, and is successively convicted of immorality, of treason, of transgressing the law of nations, and of murder, is Mary Queen of Scotland. This confusion grievously detracts from the poetic effect; yet the detail is worked out with much skill, and Elizabeth's reluctance to pronounce sentence on Mary is subtly adumbrated—perhaps also England's surviving reverence for the Holy See (stanza 46). The next canto (x.) is also full of fine poetry; but it suffers when we have discovered that it is a covert and exaggerated celebration of the recent wars in the Low Countries, in which Prince Arthur, whom we are more used to associate with Tintagel and Lyonesse, has just achieved victories that leave Spain a mere thing of the past. This sacrifice of poetry,

however, was one made, not to worldly interest, but mainly to a perverted enthusiasm and the spirit of the age. (In many a man there are two men ; and in the two there is not half the strength there would have been in one only. f Thus in that great and good man, Walter Scott, we find both the Highlander and the Lowlander, the one delighting in the clan-life, the other toiling at Edinburgh ; the one passionate for the Stuarts, the other more than content with the new order of things. This explains Spenser to us. In him we find at once the poet of the Middle Ages and the man of the Renaissance. If Spenser and the " Wizard of the North " had each intrenched himself in what was greatest within him, and discarded the rest, each would have left behind him a greater and more homogeneous work. Especially I cannot but believe that those stains on the surface of Spenser's poetry which, though seldom snares to moral principle, are serious insults to moral taste, and need to be stepped over like bad spots on a road, came to him from the coarseness of the age in which he lived, and to which the great Elizabethan drama, excepting in the main Shakespeare, bears so deplorable a witness. It is true that in Chaucer, and far more in Boccaccio, both of them men of the middle ages, there is also much to be regretted ; but there is nothing of the same sort in Petrarch or Dante ; and in Spenser's noble and refined nature it is with these that he is to be classed, and not less his friend, Sir Philip Sidney, who, if he had lived earlier, might, not improbably,

have escaped the few blemishes that rest on his chivalrous character, and from which his exquisite poetry is not wholly exempt. Chaucer was the early spring of English literature. But for the Wars of the Roses, and the barbarism bequeathed by the usurpation of Henry IV., its later spring also must have had its great poet. That poet would have been Spenser if he had been born at half the interval, near two centuries, between Chaucer and the summer glories of Shakespeare, and if he had found an audience.

It is no detraction from the genius of Spenser to say that it partook the evil as well as the good of his age. Most great poets have done the same, and sometimes the greatest the most; for in the largest degree they have learned their art, as children learn to speak—viz. by sympathy and imitation, and thus they do not easily escape the bad moral dialects and depraved intellectual idioms of their time. If Milton had not lived in the days

When pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
Was beat by fist instead of a stick,

he would not have made the Almighty speak "like a school divine," and he might have delineated a more Christian and less Mahometan ideal of woman than is suggested by the line

He for God only : she for God in him.

He might have bequeathed us a *Paradise Regained* finer even than his immortal *Paradise Lost*; his stern prophet rod might have blossomed like Aaron's, and

diffused the fragrance of many a poem precious as his *Lycidas*, and of healing breath like his *Comus*; nor would his record of the Fall have included a passage the irreverence of which, considering that he records the parents of the human race, is not to be excused by the desire to point a moral. Chaucer also bears, for good and evil, the marks of his time. The good of that time is reflected in the "Christianised humanity" of his best and least-known legends, one of which, "The Prioress's Tale," has been modernised by Wordsworth with a devout faithfulness in striking contrast with Dryden's translations from the father-bard. But Chaucer's age did not escape a *moral* latitudinarianism, to which we must attribute the licence of some of his poems, bewailed by him on his deathbed. No doubt, in his inmost heart, he loved best the narrow path that leads to the heights; but the carelessness of a disposition less lofty than broad made him indulgent to the "broad-school" in morals; and English poetry has had to pay the forfeit. We can only guess how many a noble story "left untold" might have been ennobled more by the manly genius that left to us the *Canterbury Tales*, but left that work unfinished. Few of the great poets, excluding those of Spain, seem to have given to us more than fragments of what they might have given.

Let us pass to the pleasanter part of our subject—those transcendent merits of Spenser which admit no dispute. His chief characteristic is perhaps his sense of beauty; but with him the beautiful means the

Platonic "Fair and Good." The one was not the ornament merely of the other. As oxygen and hydrogen not only blend in the composition of water, but so unite as to become a single substance as simple as either gas, so in his poetry the fair and the good coexist as a single element. He is the converse of ordinary poets. When his theme forces on him the sensational in place of the beautiful, the poet gets sleepy. Some of his battles admit of grand incidents, and he always knows how to make the most of such ; but where fight is nothing more than fight, it is to him but a business that has to be transacted. Stanza here follows stanza, each a single sentence, the fifth line not seldom an echo of the fourth, the language diffuse, and the metre monotonous, the chief pause constantly recurring at the end of the line. But this is not Spenser. When he has killed off his man, he feels relieved. Something brings back the beautiful to his theme, and the poet wakens : his language becomes that of a man inspired ; every epithet has its significance, every metrical change its meaning ; the frost melts, the stream of melody flows again ; and the bramble close by, or the forest-roof far off, "glistens with a livelier ray."

Sometimes the beauty is minute, as—

Two goodly trees, that faire did spred
 Their arms abroad, with grey moss overcast ;
 And their greene leaves trembling with every blast
 Made a calme shadowe far in compass round.

More often it is touched with a vague ideal, as—

And low, where dawning day doth never peepe
 His dwelling is : there Tethys his wet bed
 Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe
 In silver dew his ever-drooping head ;
 While sad night over him her mantle black doth spred.

Sometimes the truth to nature seems a suggestion
 to art such as Salvator's—

As an aged tree
 High growing on the top of rocky clift,
 Whose heart-strings with keene steele nigh hewen be ;
 The mighty trunck half rent with ragged rift
 Doth roll adoune the rocks.

It is singular how the poet's character reflects itself in his descriptions of scenery. Spenser's was gentle, and the nature which he sings is that which is least troubled with storms, and smiles on its admirer. He likes mountains best when they keep their distance ; but he can never be near enough to the reedy river's brim, or familiar enough with the cowslips on the mead. Professor Dowden, an admirable critic, remarks, "Spenser's landscape possesses a portion, as it were, of feminine beauty" ("Heroines of Spenser").¹ It is noteworthy that the careless descriptions incidentally introduced into his narratives are far more true to Nature than his more elaborate pictures of her, such as "The Garden of Sensual Delight," Book II. canto v., or "The Bower of Bliss," Book II. canto xii. In the latter class Nature is generalised : we have catalogues of trees, not the tree itself ; and the intellectual beauty of Nature is drowned in her Epicurean appeal to the sense. The passage last

¹ The *Cornhill Magazine*, June 1879.

referred to is largely taken from Tasso; for in those days poets were ready alike to borrow and to lend; and wholesale plagiarism was neither concealed nor complained of. But Spenser was always best when he depended most on his own genius. It was his modesty, not his need, that made him borrow. He seems to have regarded it as a tribute of respect.

(Spenser's extraordinary sense of the beautiful at once shows itself when he describes art in any of its forms.) Nothing in "The Bower of Bliss" surpasses the description of its ivory gate with the story of Jason, Medea, and the Argo graven upon it, and that of the fountain carved all over with "curious imageree." Another specimen of this excellence is his description of the Temple of Isis, its emblematic sculpture, and its stately ministrations (Book V. canto vii.) In this canto occurs a passage which has been more than once imitated in modern poetry. Britomart recounts to an aged priest of the temple a vision which has left her stunned and amazed. The priest listens long—

Like to a weake faint-hearted man he fared
Through great astonishment of that strange sight;
And with long locks up-standing stifly, stared
Like one adawèd with some dreadful spright;
So filled with heavenly fury thus he her behight.

He prophesies her future greatness. The reader of Scott's *Lord of the Isles*, and of Macaulay's *Prophecy of Cypys*, when they come to the finest passage in each, may recognise its original here. Among the most remarkable instances, perhaps, of the mode in which Spenser's sense of beauty shows itself in the conception

of pictures and statues, are those in the "House of Busyrane" (Book III. canto xi.), and the "Maske of Cupid" (Book III. canto xii.)

The gift of delineating beauty finds perhaps its most arduous triumph when exercised on the description of *incident*, a thing that passes successively from change to change, and not on permanent objects which less elude the artist's eye and hand. As an example may be cited the striving of the rival ladies for Florimel's girdle, which will not allow itself to be buckled around the waist of the fairest if upon her life there rests even the slightest stain (Book IV. canto v.) That poetic touch which suggested the expression "*nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*," moves over this episode with a light and bright felicity; and elsewhere leaves a gleam even upon that pathos in which the *Faery Queen* so richly abounds. A charming example of this is the story of the gentle squire who loves Belphœbe. He saves Amoret; and his compassion for the victim he has rescued half-dead from the "salvage man" makes him for a moment seem to forget that love. Amoret lies on the forest-floor in swoon, when Belphœbe arrives and finds him

From her faire eyes wiping the deawy wet
Which softly still'd, and kissing them atweenc.

Belphœbe has not returned the gentle squire's devotion to herself, but yet she regards his fidelity as her due, and with no words except "Is this the Faith?" she recoils into the woods. He sees her no more. He throws his weapons away; he will speak to none; he

hides himself in the forest's gloomiest nook ; his fair locks

He let to grow and griesly to concrew
Uncompt, uncurled, and carelessly unsted ;

That like a pinèd ghost he soon appears.

When his "deare lord" Prince Arthur finds him, he knows him not ; and the abandoned one will answer nothing. Prince Arthur notes that "Belpheobe" is graved upon every tree ; but knows only that the forlorn wretch before him must have been one of gentle birth. Help comes from a tenderer friend. A turtle-dove that has lost her mate understands him better, and laments close beside him in a strain

So sensibly compyled that in the same
Him seemèd oft he *heerd his owne right name*.

Each day he shares with her his woodland fare, and at last binds around her neck a jewel

Shaped like a heart yet bleeding of the wound,
given to him by Belpheobe. The dove flies away, and wafts it afar to the spot where Belpheobe sits. She recognises and tries to recover it ; but the dove, swerving ever as she is about to be caught, insensibly leads her through the forest till they reach the gentle squire, and then flies into his hand. He speaks nothing ; it is long before Belpheobe recognises him, and then it is not by his features, but by his sorrow,

That her in-burning wrath she gan abate,
And him received againe to former favour's state.

Spenser's dove may have suggested to Southey the "green bird" which served as guide to Thalaba.

Not less subtly is beauty blended with sorrow of a more tragic order in that wonderful scene (Book III. canto xii.), in which Amoret endures the last great trial of her constancy before her deliverance by the hand of Britomart. Amoret is the bride of Scudamore, torn from him on her wedding day by an enchanter.

No living wight she saw in all that roome,
Save that same woeful lady, both whose hands
Were bounden fast, that did her ill become,
And her small waste girt round with yron bands
Unto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands.

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
Figuring strange characters of his art ;
With living blood he those characters wrate,
Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,
Seeming transfix'd with a cruell dart,
And all perforce to make her him to love.

Many such passages might be referred to. In Spenser's poetry, whether it be grief or gladness which he describes, the beauty mingled with each is stronger than either. From him Keats might have taken the line—

Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self ;

and Shelley a kindred one—

The beauty of delight makes lovers glad.

The highest beauty in Spenser's poetry is that beauty which might most easily have eluded the vision of Lord Byron, vigorously as he delineated that which was on his level ; for, as Professor Dowden has remarked, "Beauty, Spenser maintained, is twofold. There is a beauty which is a mere pasture to the eye ;

it is a spoil for which we grow greedy, . . . and there is the higher beauty of which the peculiar quality is a penetrating radiance; it illuminates all that comes into its presence; it is a beam from the divine fount of light."¹ Such beauty, while it is actual, is ideal first; and the Professor rightly adds, "For Spenser, behind each woman made to worship or love rises a sacred presence—Womanhood itself." This is such criticism as Spenser would have welcomed.

Nowhere does Spenser's sense of beauty more finely illustrate itself, in the form of incident, than in the battle between Artegall and Britomart, when neither recognises the other. Her helmet is cloven, and her golden tresses falling down reveal the maiden warrior—a maiden whose beauty converts severity itself into beauty. He kneels, "and of his wonder made religion." She does not desire worship, but fair fight, and again lifts her sword, but cannot strike. As she bends above him she recognises in that countenance,

Tempred with sterness and stout maiestie,

the heroic image of Man she had seen in Merlin's magic glass, and loved ever since with a love which, while imparting strength, not weakness, had made all meaner love an impossibility to her. The metamorphosis that takes place gradually in her, and suddenly in the knight, is illustrated in stanzas of which it is impossible to say whether the beauty expressed, or the beauty implied, predominates. It is not till she has heard that name whereon her

¹ The *Cornhill Magazine*, June 1879.

imagination has long fed that the metamorphosis is complete. Artegall does not note it. He sees her face still as he saw it first, "so goodly grave and full of princely awe," that he cannot declare his love. If she was swiftly won by the phantom image of the warrior, she was slowly won by the warrior himself. We are later told how, after no easy suit, at last

she yielded her consent
To be his love, and take him for her lord.

The imagination was one thing, and the heart another; and in the virgin the gallery leading from the palace to the temple was a long one.

Not a few of the incidents in the *Faery Queen* are of an order of beauty which teaches us that the sublime, so commonly contrasted with the beautiful, is itself but beauty in its highest manifestation, though sometimes beauty of a threatening kind. Such is the catastrophe of the battle between Prince Arthur and the Souldan (Book V. canto viii.) The Souldan, in disdain of a foe whom he expects to trample under foot, mounts, in complete armour,

a charret high
With yron wheeles and hookes armed dreadfully,
And drawn of cruel steedes which he had fed
With flesh of men.

Again and again he dashes at his foe. The Prince evades the onset, but never can get near enough to the enemy to strike him. He, too, wears mail; but it is mail from the armoury of God, that armour described by St. Paul as the pre-requisite of the Christian's warfare—the "*whole* armour of righteousness."

Many have sunk beneath Arthur's sword ; but none have seen his shield, which is covered by a veil. At last, as the chariot makes its terrible way to him, the Prince withdraws that veil, and there leaps from the shield a lightning flash keen as his sword and brighter than the sun. The horses turn and fly. In their madness they rush over hill and dale, dashing the chariot to pieces against the trees and rocks. The Souldan at last is found beneath its iron wheels, "torn all to rags, and rent with many a wound." On another occasion the virtue of this Divine shield gains him the victory in different fashion. The Prince fights with a giant of more than mortal might. As he is sinking beneath the Titan's club the veil is torn from his shield. Once more the giant raises his weapon—

But all in vain ; for he has *read his end*
In that bright shield, and all his forces spend
Themselves in vain ; for since that glancing sight
He hath no powre to hurt, nor to defend.

This may have been unconsciously in Shelley's mind when, promising to Freedom the victory over her enemies, he sang—

Thy shield is as a mirror
To make their blind slaves see, and with fierce gleam
Turn back his hungry sword against the wearer.¹

Another characteristic of Spenser's poetry, and one eminently ancillary to its sense of beauty, is its suggestiveness. If he is often diffuse, his most significant passages are yet marked by a brevity which imparts to them a proportionate intensity. Here is an example.

¹ *Ode to Naples.*

Guyon, the emblem-knight of Temperance (*Faery Queen*, Book II. canto i.), is led through scenes meant to teach him successively the baleful effects of ungoverned passion. He hears the wail of a woman, Amavia, whose husband has deserted her, mastered by his fatal love for the witch Acrasia. His faithful wife had rescued him from thrall; but even his departure from her castle the witch had given him an enchanted cup: he had drained it and died. Guyon finds that wife beside a fountain bleeding from a self-inflicted wound in her heart, and with a late-born babe in her lap—a babe blood-stained. Beside her lies the murdered husband, dead. She tells Guyon her story, and dies, but not until she has thus adjured her babe—

Thy little hands embrewed in bleeding breast
Loe I for pledges leave. So give me leave to rest.

The good knight deems that

since this wretched woman overcome
Of anguish rather than of crime hath been,

she merits the last offices of Christian charity. With the aid of a hermit he digs a grave, strews it with cypress branches, and inters the husband and wife; but first cuts off with the dead knight's sword a tress from the head of each, flings it into the grave, and vows to revenge them. Lastly—

The little babe up in his armes he hent,
Who with sweet pleasaunce and bold blandishment
Can smyle on them, that rather ought to weep.

Guyon bends above the fountain to wash the mother's blood from the hands of her babe. He labours in

vain: the sanguine blots but deepen, and can never be erased. The little hands must keep their blood-stains,

That they his mother's innocence may tell,
As she bequeathed in her last testament ;
That as a sacred symbole it may dwell
In her sonne's flesh, to mind revengement.

Here is a memorable symbol of the passion that can never sleep, and the vengeance bequeathed from age to age. The beauty of this tale is even greater than its terror. It is a flower that wears blood-drops for its ornament, yet is a flower still. But greatest of all is its significance. The same lesson is taught by the bleeding spray which Guyon breaks from one of the two trees into which two lovers had been changed. They stand side by side, summer after summer, and murmur in the same breeze ; but their branches can never meet.

Not less characteristic of Spenser's poetry is its wonderful descriptive power. Everywhere this faculty is illustrated, but nowhere more exquisitely than in that passage where we meet Belphebe out hunting (Book II. canto iii.) The poet's picture, like Guido's Aurora, has the freshness of the morning about it: youth and gladness breathe in every line, beam in every gesture, and wave with every movement of that raiment made in this rich description almost as beauteous as the slender limbs and buoyant form it embraces, yet laughingly reveals. It is plain that so long as this youthful Dian may but race with those winds which add a richer glow to her cheek and more

vivid splendour to her eye, so long as she may but chase the hart and hind through the dewy forest lawns, so long must all love-ties be for her without a meaning. Dryden has imitated this passage, after his fashion, in his *Cymon and Iphigenia*, missing the poetry and purity of the whole, and imparting a touch of coarseness, not felt in the original, to what he retains—just as in his version of Chaucer's poems he omits each finer touch, and makes the rest vulgar. A sculptor might perhaps remark that the line—

Upon her eyelids many graces sate

would be more in place if a Venus were described rather than this handmaid of the "quivered Queen" who, like Apollo, is ever represented in Greek art with lifted lids and eyes wide open. Dian is a luminary, like her brother, and even in the marble her eye flings its glances far.

The allegory of "Despair" is too well known to need comment; but it can never be too much praised. It proves that narrative poetry may, in the hand of a great master, fully reach the *intensity* of the drama, and carry to the same height those emotions of pity and terror through which to purify the soul was, according to Aristotle, the main function of tragedy. Spenser could at will brace his idyllic strain till it became palpably the prelude of that fierce and fair Elizabethan drama destined so soon to follow it.

The most grateful admirer of Spenser will perhaps be the most willing to admit that, with all its trans-

cendent merits, the *Faery Queen*, like all long poems, has great faults—and can afford to have them. It is no irreverence to acknowledge them. If his more important allegories are at once deep and graphic, others are crude or trivial. To the nobler class belong the allegory of “Guile”; of Talus, the iron man with the iron flail, who represents Judgment only, and is so happily distinguished from Artegall, who represents Justice; and to it also the fantastic shapes that threaten Guyon as he sails along the sea of mortal life. To a more vulgar order must be remanded such allegories as those of “Envy,” “Detraction,” “Scandal,” the Vices in the “House of Pride,” and those which, in the form of beasts, assail the castle of “Temperance”; while “Furor,” “Strife,” “Diet,” etc., are frigid and unpoetic. The battle between Una’s knight and the winged dragon half a mile long, if serious, admits of no defence, and if the contrary, only reminds us that Spenser’s genius was the genius of the north, and could not afford to be insincere. Spenser is also often prolix, and repeats himself. Except in his highest moods, he seldom braced himself up to do his best as Milton constantly did with a proud conscientiousness, and Shakespeare more often than is consistent with the fable that he “never blotted a line.” Spenser was probably himself an “easy” reader as well as writer; and when books were few a poet might expect to find students docile and not soon tired. He was large in the great gift of admiration, and too true a poet to suspect in others a touch of that essentially

unpoetical quality, cynicism. Like the mathematician, the poet of romance had a right to start with his postulates, such as that the gods of mythology might lawfully be mixed up with saints; that a knight might receive any number of wounds and be well again next day; that physical strength was commonly the expression of a corresponding moral greatness; and that the most delicate ladies suffered nothing from lack of food, or exposure to the elements. It was less safe to assume that battles would always have the inexhaustible interest they had for those who gathered round Homer when he sang.

(But the most serious fault in the *Faery Queen* was unquestionably a structural one. In Chaucer, whom Spenser revered so loyally and acknowledged as his master, the stories are complete, each in itself; the narrative is thus easily followed, the interest undivided, and the catastrophe conclusive. But in the *Faery Queen* the tales are interwoven; the same knights and ladies reappear successively in many of them; the story breaks off where the interest is at its crisis; and the reader is invited to follow again the fortunes of persons he has forgotten. This is to cheat us doubly. A short poem may have the bright perfection of a flower, an epic the stately mass of a tree that combines the variety of its branches with the unity of the stem; but a romance of this intricate character is neither the flower nor the tree,—it is a labyrinth of underwood not easily pierced. Perseverance may vanquish all difficulties; but when this has been

effected the details of the poem are more than the whole, and it thus loses that consummate effect produced by "*il piu nell uno*." Let us turn to the tale of the sisters Belphebe and Amoret. It is one of the loveliest, deepest, and most original of legends; yet for most readers its beauty, and even its meaning, are drowned in the interruptions that perplex it. Tasso did not fall into this error; neither did Walter Scott, though he wrote poetic romances, not epics. It was Ariosto who wished to show his ingenuity in thus alternately tangling his skein and recovering his thread; and his readers, who desired to be amused and excited, not moved or raised, missed nothing. But Spenser's poem was stored with matter more precious; and to it the loss produced by this confusion is grievous. Here, again, an inferior model was his evil genius. He was always greatest when he leaned least on others; but he had the modesty which belongs to noble and refined natures; and far from fully asserting his own greatness, he did not know it. The proem of his great work illustrates this defect. Instinctively he had chosen the noblest of themes; but he was not conscious of its greatness, or he would not have blended with his invocation to the Muse another to Venus, Mars, Cupid, and Queen Elizabeth.

Let us return to the merits of this great poet. It is not by an analysis of Spenser's special qualities, taken separately, that we reach an adequate estimate of his greatness. It was especially his gift, and one proceeding from the proportionateness of a mind over

which the sense of beauty ever held a sceptre of gentleness, that his faculties worked together harmoniously, and that at his best no one could say which of them predominated. The passages characterised in the highest degree by descriptive power are characterised not less by loveliness, by suggestiveness, by moral wisdom, and commonly by spiritual aspiration. These qualities can, in such passages, no more be separated than the colour of a flower can be separated from its form and fragrance. His mind was a *whole*, and not merely a collection of faculties or "parts," often, in inferior minds, as disproportioned to that whole as the restless limbs of an octopus are to the body in which they inhere, but of which they seem no portion; and it is this characteristic, more than other, which places him among the world's poets of the first class. To understand him requires a knowledge of him habitual, not a got-up knowledge. The novice must read him wisely; and in our "fast" days he commonly has not time to do so, even if he has the docility of goodwill, and that gift of tentative faith through which the young often reach unconsciously an understanding of great poetry. (To appreciate the compass of Spenser's genius we should bring together those narratives which illustrate it when directed with equal energy to the most different themes. Thus "The House of Holiness" may be usefully read after "The Cave of Mammon," and compared with it. These two great descriptions of the best and the worst that we know of here below may be regarded as the two

opposite extremes at once of his descriptive and emblematic art. In the first named we have, if not Spenser's "Paradiso," at least the "terrestrial paradise" of his "Purgatorio": in the latter we have his "Inferno," and the poet is equally at his ease in the delineation of both. Mammon means, not wealth only, but the first of those "three enemies" against which the Christian is militant—viz. the "World"; and this "world," emblemized in gold, Spenser represents as a world under our world—a dreadful subterranean world of greatness apostate and splendour lost in gloom. Mammon wears a mail, though not a knightly mail—

His iron cote, all overgrown with rust,
Was underneath envelopèd with gold.

Descending with this grim earth-god, Guyon finds himself in a vast plain leading to Pluto's "griesly rayne." The way is bordered by dreadful shapes—Pain, Strife, Revenge, Despight, Treason, Hate—

But gnawing Gealosy, out of their sight
Sitting alone, his bitter lips did bite;
And trembling Feare still to and fro did fly.
And over them sad Horror with grim hew
Did always soar, beating his yron wings.

They advance through the gate of the golden city; but a spectre with uplifted hand treads ever in the dusk behind the Christian knight, ready to close upon him the first moment that he covets aught he sees. Nothing can exceed the gloomy grandeur with which is described the palace of Mammon—all sumptuousness and all terror—roof, floors, and walls all of gold in

decay, and half hid in the dusk, while over the pavements lie scattered dead men's bones. Guyon sees the Stygian furnaces and the fiends that mould the liquid metal into ingots, and pour the golden wave, "the fountain of the worlde's good," into chalice and urn. Next he enters a narrow passage guarded by a giant, not made of flesh and bone, but "all of golden mould," although he lives and moves and lifts his iron club (stanza xl.) This winding way ends in a limitless temple supported by pillars innumerable of solid gold—

And every pillour deckèd was full deare
With crownes and diadems and titles vaine
Which mortal princes wore whiles they on earth did rayne.

Plainly these princes were vassals of one suzerain—the "prince of this world." That temple is thronged
X not with men, but with nations; and on a dais at the upper end is enthroned a queen, whose countenance casts the beam of its baleful beauty athwart the multitudes that blindly press up towards her;—and yet that beauty is but a counterfeit. In her right hand she holds a golden chain, the upper part of which is lost in heaven, while the lower descends to hell.
X That chain is ambition,

And every linck thereof a step of dignity.

This queen is "Philotime," or Worldly Honour, the daughter of Mammon. All round this subterraneous palace lie the dusky gardens, the trees of which bend low, but with the fruits of sadness, of madness, and of death: and in the midst of this garden stands solitary

the Tree of Death. It rises high above all the other trees, and embraces the dolorous precinct with its branches

Which overhanging, they themselves did steepe
In a blacke flood which flowed about it round ;
That is the river of Cocytus deepe
In which full many soules do endless wayle and weepe.

Among the denizens of that flood there is one whose hands but blacken more the more he labours to wash them clean. It is Pilate. Milton confessed that "Spenser was his original"; nor is it easy to see how "the sublime" could be carried higher than it is here carried by the "gentle bard." May not Shakespeare have been indebted to him, when he conceived his Lady Macbeth and her "Out, damnèd spot"?

The moment that Guyon breathes again the upper air, his strength fails, and for days he lies in deadly swoon. This is an instance of Spenser's suggestiveness. It implies at once the "burthen" of that vision which he had beheld, the divine support through which he had sustained its weight, and the withdrawal of that support when needed no longer. Spenser was one of those who regarded the poet as a "Vates," or prophet; and on this occasion no one could have said of the prophet, "non obtinuit visionem a Domino." "The Cave of Mammon" was a prophecy not inopportune. The Renaissance, whatever its merits, was a time of pride, wealth-worship, and imperial dreams. The World had long shared the throne with Religion; but she was beginning to aspire after rule unparticipated.

Spain, then the first European Power, was planting slavery in a new world, and burthening the seas with fleets which brought her from the Indies that gold destined not only to enfeeble but to impoverish her by discountenancing honest industry. England had substituted, for that mediæval regimen in which Liberty was maintained through the balanced powers of a king "primus inter pares," of the nobility, of the Church, and of the popular municipalities, a despotic monarchy destined to vanish with the last Stuart. France was on her way to an Absolutism, through which she was to pass to her Revolution. It was time that a warning voice should be uttered by him who was certainly "high priest for that year" in the realm of song; but that voice should have hymned a different "Gloriana."

The infinite variety of Spenser's genius is perhaps most forcibly brought home to us when we compare a canto in his sixth Book with "The Cave of Mammon" and "The House of Holiness." It is as unlike each of these as they are unlike each other; and it is perhaps more representative of the poet's habitual mind. It too has its mystical meaning. It is not either the life unblest, or the saintly life, which is there described; it is the life of the Humanities, a picture of humanity as it may be conceived of in some golden age. I allude to the vision of Calidore on the summit of Mount Acidale (Book VI. canto x.) The Knight of Courtesy musing on his Pastorella, the original perhaps of Shakespeare's Perdita, ascends from a river's bank to the summit of a fair hill, and comes to an

open space begirt by "trees of honour" which rise higher than all trees besides, and "all winter as in summer, bud." Within that precinct dance in radiant circle a hundred nymphs, arrayed only in the light of their own unblemished and unashamed beauty. In the centre of the ring three of their number, and the most beautiful, sing as well as dance round a maiden of earth, who, as such, wears maiden attire, and who is more beautiful even than those three. While the others engird her, like Ariadne's tiar, and pelt her with flowers, she alone stands in the midst unastonished, and "crowned with a rosy girland." At last Calidore ventures to approach from the skirt of the wood, and the lovely pageant dissolves into air. There remains but the shepherd, Colin Clout (the name by which Spenser had designated himself in his early poems), who sits on the hill still holding that pipe whose music had evoked those nymphs, and to which they ever danced. The human maiden is his "Elizabeth," that maiden hard to be won, but who at last not only loved the poet, but fostered his song, as we may infer from the lines—

She to whom the shepherd pyped alone;
That made him pype so merrily, as never none.

The shepherd explains the vision. That hilltop had been preferred to her own Cytheron by Venus, in the olden time when she was still pure as the sea-foam whence she had sprung, and when between herself and Dian there was friendship, not war; and there she used to dance with the Graces. Venus loved that

spot no more ; but the three Graces and the hundred lesser Graces native to that hill, still haunted it : the shepherd's pipe had still power to draw them from their ambush, and among them there was still that one maiden of earth whom they had elected as their sister, and on whom they showered their tribute.

These three on men all gracious gifts bestow
Which decke the body or adorne the mynde,
To make them lovely or well-favoured show ;
As comely carriage, entertainment kynde,
Sweet semblaunt, friendly offices that bynde,
And all the complements of curtesie,
That teach us how, to each degree and kynde
We should ourselves demeane, to low, to hie,
To friends, to foes ; which skill men call Civility.

Therefore they alwaies smoothly seem to smile,
That we likewise should mylde and gentle be ;
And also naked are, that without guile
Or false dissemblance all them plaine may see,
Simple and true from covert malice free.

Such was human life, as Spenser had dreamed it, perhaps amid the groves of Penshurst, or on that walk at Wilton, a region not less classic, on which Spenser's early friend had paced with one like himself—"Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother." Such, too, is the one glimpse we have of Spenser's life with his "beautifullest Bride," the best sung of women except Beatrice, though but an Irish "country lasse of low degree"—

Ne, lesse in vertue that beseemes her well
Doth she exceed the rest of all her race ;
For which the Graces that here wont to dwell
Have for more honor brought her to this place,
And graced her so much to be another Grace.

This canto is the complement to Spenser's "Song

made in lieu of many ornaments," his far-famed *Epithalamion*. I have heard Wordsworth remark, more than once, that in its long and exquisitely balanced stanzas there was a swanlike movement and a subtle metrical sweetness, the secret of which he could never wholly discover; and the like of which he found nowhere else except in Milton's *Lycidas*.

I am aware how inadequate these remarks are to their great theme. I could not, without passing the limits within which I must restrict myself, advert here to several matters which properly belong to it, especially the large and deep philosophy expressed in, or latent under, Spenser's poetry. He was the philosophic poet of his age, as Wordsworth is of ours; and the philosophy of those two great poets, though in no sense at variance, was as different, the one from the other, as the character of their genius. Spenser's castle by the Mulla stood, and a fragment of it still stands, about thirty miles to the south of the house in which I write. That house, too, like Kilcolman, was the house of a poet—one who from his boyhood had loved Spenser well, and in whom a discerning critic had noted a sympathetic spirit—the poet of *Mary Tudor*. The eyes of both poets must have rested often on the same exquisitely drawn mountain range, that of the Galtees, though they saw it in a different perspective. Mountains, while they separate neighbours, create, notwithstanding a neighbourly tie between those who dwell far apart; and though the barriers of

time are more stubborn things than those of space,
when I look from our eastern windows at Galtymore,
I am sometimes reminded of the lines written by
Wordsworth at the grave of Burns, on whose verse
the later poet had fed in youth—

Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends
By Skiddaw seen,—
Neighbours we were, and loving friends
We might have been.

II

SPENSER AS A PHILOSOPHIC POET

It often happens that some eminent characteristic of a great poet has almost escaped observation owing to the degree in which other characteristics, not higher but more attractive to the many, have also belonged to him. Spenser is an instance of this. If it were asked what chiefly constitutes the merit of his poetry, the answer would commonly be, its descriptive power, or its chivalrous sentiment, or its exquisite sense of beauty; yet the quality which he himself desiderated most for his chief work was one not often found in union with these, viz. sound and true philosophic thought. This characteristic is perhaps his highest. It was the one which chiefly gained for him the praise of Shakespeare—

Spenser to me, whose *deep conceit* is such
As, passing all conceit, needs no defence;

and it was doubtless the merit to which he owed the influence which Milton acknowledged that Spenser's poetry had exercised over his own. There is more of

philosophy in one book of the *Faery Queen* than in all the cantos of his Italian models. In Italy the thinkers were generally astute politicians or recluse theologians ; and her later poets, excepting of course Tasso, cared more to amuse a brilliant court with song and light tale than to follow the steps of Dante along the summits of serious thought. England, on the other hand, uniting both the practical and the meditative mind with the imaginative instincts of southern lands, had thereby strengthened that mind and those instincts, and thus occupied a position neither above nor beneath the region of thoughtful poetry. In the latter part of the sixteenth and earlier part of the seventeenth century, she possessed a considerable number of poets who selected, apparently without offence, very grave themes for their poetry. It will suffice to name such writers as Samuel Daniel, John Davies, George Herbert, Dr. Donne, Giles Fletcher, Habington, and, not much later, Dr. Henry More, the Platonist.

These poets, however, came later than Spenser, and were not a little indebted to him, while yet they were, in some respects, unlike him. Some of them worked on themes so abstract and metaphysical as to be almost beyond the limits of true poetic art. The difficulty was itself an attraction to them, and their ambition was more to instruct than to delight. Spenser loved philosophy as well as they, but was too truly a poet to allow of his following her when she strayed into "a barren and dry land," or of his adopting the

didactic method when he illustrated philosophic themes. ✓ Truth and beauty are things correlative; and very profound truths can be elucidated in verse without the aid of such technical reasoning processes as those with which Dryden conducted his argument in the "Hind and Panther," and Pope in his "Essays." Spenser's imagination never forsook the region of the sympathies; but it had the special gift of drawing within their charmed circle themes which for another poet must have ever remained outside it, and of suffusing them at once with the glow of passion and with the white light of high intelligence. It is true that he dealt much in allegory; but though allegory is commonly a cold thing—always, indeed, if it be mere allegory—yet whenever Spenser's genius is true to itself, his allegory catches fire and raises to the heights of song themes which would otherwise have descended to the level of ordinary prose. Had Spenser's poetry not included this philosophic vein, it would not have been in sympathy with a time which produced a Bacon, whose prose is often the noblest poetry, as well as a Sidney, whose life was a poem. At the Merchant Taylors' Grammar School, Bishop Andrews and, as is believed, Richard Hooker, were among his companions; and when he entered Cambridge, Pembroke Hall was at least as much occupied with theological and metaphysical discussion as with classical literature.

We may go further. It was in a large measure the strength of his human sympathies which at once

forced Spenser to include philosophy among the subjects of his poetry, and prevented that philosophy from becoming unfit for poetry. As he was eminently a poet of the humanities, so his philosophy was a philosophy of the humanities; he could no more have taken up a physiological theme for a poem, like Phineas Fletcher's "Purple Island," than a geographical one, like Drayton's "Polyolbion." The philosophy which interested him was that which "comes home to the business and bosoms of men." It was philosophy allied to life—philosophy moral, social, and political. Such philosophy is latent in all great poetry, though it is in some ages only that it becomes patent. Let us turn first to his political and social philosophy.

We know from Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh that to embody a great scheme of philosophy was the end which he proposed to himself in writing the *Faery Queen*. That poem was to consist of twelve books; and the hero of each was to impersonate one of the twelve moral virtues enumerated by Aristotle. This poem he proposed to follow up by a second, the hero of which was to have been King Arthur after he had acceded to the throne, and which was to have illustrated the political virtues. We learn from Todd's *Life of Spenser* that at a party of friends held near Dublin, in the house of Ludowick Bryskett, the poet gave the same account of his poem, then unpublished, but of which a considerable part had been written. Bryskett, on that occasion, spoke of him as "not only

perfect in the Greek tongue, but also very well read in philosophy, both moral and natural."

Unhappily, only half of the earlier romance was written, or at least has reached us, and no part of the second; but much which belongs to the subject of the second poem may be found in fragments scattered over the six books of the *Faery Queen*. One of these political fragments vindicates the old claim of poets to be prophets; for the great revolutionary dogma expounded in it is one which, though its earlier mutterings may have been heard at the time of the German Anabaptists, did not "open its mouth" and "speak great things" for two centuries after Spenser had denounced the approaching imposture. That imposture is the one, now but too well known, which, in the name of justice, substitutes for it the fiction of a universal equality in the interests of which all human society hitherto known is to be levelled down and remodelled. Artegal, Spenser's emblem of Justice, rides forth on his mission accompanied by his squire Talus, the iron man, with the iron flail. On the sea-side they descry "many nations" gathered together—

There they beheld a mighty gyant stand
Upon a rocke, and holding forth on hie
An huge great paire of ballaunce in his hand,
With which he boasted in his surquedrie¹
That all the world he would weigh equallie,
If aught he had the same to counterpoize;
For want whereof he weighed vanity,
And filled his ballaunce full of idle toys;
And was admired much of fools, women, and boys.

He sayd that he would all the earth uptake
 And all the sea, divided each from either ;
 So would he of the fire one ballaunce make,
 And of the ayre without or wind or weather :
 Then would he ballaunce heaven and hell together,
 And all that did within them all containe ;
 Of all whose weight he would not misse a fether ;
 And looke what surplus did of each remaine,
 He would to his own part restore the same againe.

Therefore the vulgar did about him flocke,
 And cluster thicke unto his leasings vaine,
 Like foolish flies about a hony-crocke
 In hope by him great benefit to gain.¹

The Knight of Justice here breaks in, and affirms that the giant ought, before restoring everything to its original condition, to ascertain exactly "What was the poyse of every part of yore." The giant knows that the best mode to meet an unanswerable reply is by reiteration—

Therefore I will throw downe these mountains hie,
 And make them levell with the lowly plaine,
 These towring rocks which reach unto the skie,
 I will thrust down into the deepest maine,
 And as they were them equalize againe.
 Tyrants, that make men subject to their law,
 I will suppress that they no more may raine,
 And lordlings curbe that commons overaw,
 And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw.

Artegal retorts that what the sea devours of the land in one region it surrenders in another, and that if the field did not augment its stores by drawing decayed matter into its bosom, it could not send up the living harvest the next year. In all this interchange Nature but obeys the great Creator.

¹ *Faery Queen*, Book V. canto ii. stanza 30.

They live, they die, like as He doth ordaine,
 Ne ever any asketh reason why ;
 The hills doe not the lowly dales disdaine ;
 The dales do not the lofty hills envy.
 He maketh kings to sit in sovereignty ;
 He maketh subjects to their powre obey ;
 He pulleth downe ; He setteth up on hie ;
 He gives to this ; from that He takes away :
 For all we have is His : what He list doe He may.

He takes the giant at his word, and bids him test his
 boasted power.

For take thy ballaunce, if thou be so wise,
 And weigh the winde that under heaven doth blow ;
 Or weigh the light that in the east doth rise ;
 Or weigh the thought that from man's mind doth flow.
 But if the weight of these thou canst not show,
 Weight but one word which from thy lips doth fall ;
 For how canst thou those greater secrets know,
 That doest not know the least thing of them all ?
 Ne can he rule the great that cannot reach the small.

We have all heard of the English socialist whose triumphant appeal, "Tell me, is not one man as good as another?" was unwittingly confuted by the answer of his Irish boon-companion, "To be sure he is, *and better!*" So far as equality exists at all, it exists not by nature, but through man's law, so bitterly inveighed against by the advocates of equality ; for Nature, while she is rich in compensations, makes no two things equal. Notwithstanding, the giant accepts Artega's challenge. He places the True and the False in the opposed scales of his balance, but can get no further—

For by no means the False will with the Truth be wayd.

He next puts Right and Wrong into his scales, but fails once more—

Yet all the wrongs could not a litle right downe-way.

The prophet thus turning out an impostor, Talus scales the rock, scourges him with his iron flail, flings him into the sea, and disperses the multitude.

Spenser, however, does not take one-sided views of things. He sees a connection between the madness of revolutionary idealisms and that tyranny which "maketh a wise man mad." Before we make acquaintance with the giant Equality, we are brought to the castle of a bandit chief, Pollente, who has grown to wealth through extortion.

And daily he his wrongs encreaseth more ;
 For never wight he lets to pass that way,
 Over his bridge, albee he rich or poore,
 But he him makes his passage-penny pay ;
 Else he doth hold him backe, or beat away.
 Thereto he hath a groome of evill guize,
 Whose scalp is bare, that bondage doth bewray,
 Which pols and pils the poore in piteous wize,
 But he himself upon the rich doth tyrannize.¹

Pollente has a daughter, Munera ; to her he brings his ill-gotten spoils, and with them she has purchased all the country round. Eventually Artegal slays the giant, and Talus, rejecting the bribes of Munera, drags her from under a heap of gold, her hiding-place, cuts off her hands, which are made of gold, and her feet, which are silver, and casts her into the flood.

Another ethical craze of our later time seems to have been anticipated by Spenser—that which claims for women all the civil and political privileges and functions which belong to men, and denounces, as the

¹ Book V. canto ii, stanza 6.

"subjection of woman," even that domestic obedience of the wife to the husband which is the noblest example of willing submission. That a wife's obedience is based neither on servile fear nor abject self-interest, but on that principle of love which is the characteristic crown of womanhood, is witnessed to in the expression, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall have the rule over thee." The root of that claim to domestic equality which would revolutionise the whole domestic life is patent. Those who sustain it assume that obedience is, even when necessary, still essentially a degradation. This is a "vulgar error." Obedience to a spurious authority, and obedience extorted by mere force, in each of these there exists degradation; but where the obedience is paid willingly, and paid where it is due, there obedience and authority are but two converse forms of excellence, mutually supplemental. This principle of correlative though contrasted forms of excellence was appreciated by the ages of chivalry; children knelt to their parents, and the "faithful servant," who inscribed that name alone on the title-page of his story of the "knight without fear and without reproach," regarded the title "servant" as an honourable one, not less than the title master.

The "Amazon Republic" was a Greek conception, and evinced that clearness which belonged to the Greek intelligence alike in its serious and in its sportive moods. The Greek insight perceived at once that, while the equality of the sexes may sub-

stantially exist in the way of compensatory advantages and disadvantages, it could not exist in the material form of identical rights and functions. In that form, woman must have either less than equality, or more. The lady who remarked, "I do not want women to take their stand with men on the great stage of life, because unless we sat behind the scenes we could not pull the wires," understood that women possess at present a very real power of their own; and the Athenians said of old, that if Pericles governed Athens, so did his wife, since she governed him, and so did their child, since he governed her. Here is the indirect equality produced by compensation. It is in its complete Amazonian, not its incomplete, form that Spenser deals with this quaint moral problem; and there is a deep sagacity in his mode of solving it. The Knight of Justice hears that a certain Amazon Queen, Radigund, by way of righting the wrongs of her sex, has established herself in a castle, and that she defies all knights to combat, first binding them to submit to her terms. The Amazon is not actuated by zeal for her sex; next to the inspiration of pride comes that of spite; and an idle fancy has been followed up by an envenomed grudge. Neither is Artegal's resolve to do battle with the Amazon grounded merely on his sympathy with the knights thus degraded—

"Now sure," said he, "and by the faith that I
To maidenhead and noble knighthood owe,
I will not rest till I her might do try!"

Her masculine claims he regards as an insult to all that is best in maidenhood and womanhood—a virtual denial alike of their true powers and dignities.

Artegal is victorious at first, and his enemy falls ; admiring and compassionating, the knight throws away his sword ; the Amazon revives and resumes the fight ; he can only step backwards, protecting himself with his shield ; she redoubles her blows ; and he, by the terms of their battle, becomes her slave. But the battle has not really been fought with equal weapons ; and it is owing to her beauty and his weakness that he sits ere long ranged with her other vassals, distaff in hand, and in woman's garb.

The conqueror is punished for her pride. She loses her heart to her captive in spite of her self-scorn, and she fails in her attempt to win his love. Her charm is for him gone. She has lost the power of woman by claiming that which belongs to man ; she has snatched at the shadow, and dropped the substance. It is woman that avenges the wrong done to womanhood. Britomart hears that her lover is in distress, and flies to his aid, though she believes that he had forgotten her. The virgin warrioress assails the castle of the Amazon, vanquishes her in single fight, and liberates the captives. Britomart is the loftiest of Spenser's heroines. Another poet would have made her turn in scorn from Artegal when she saw him among the knights plying the distaff. She does not do this. She is not woman unsexed, but woman raised above woman, and therefore woman still. The

sacred obedience of love binds her to the better part.
When she first saw him amid the servile crew,

She turned her head aside as nothing glad.

But she looks on him again, and sees, not what is before her, but what she remembers. She makes him lord of the conquered city; and to it she restores peace and gladness.

Let us turn next to Spenser's philosophy considered with reference to the joys and duties of life, personal and domestic. That philosophy was a comprehensive one, and regarded human life in at least three aspects. The first is the ordinary life of men lived wisely; the second is the life spiritual founded on faith in worlds unseen; the third is life lived unwisely, and dominated either by sensual passion or by pride.

To begin with his philosophy of ordinary life when wisely led. It is set forth chiefly in the Second Book, or the Legend of Temperance. The first canto tells us of the husband under a witch's spell, of the self-slain wife, and the deserted babe—all three the victims of lawless passion in the form of corrupt pleasure. In the second canto the destructive passion is anger: two knights strive in fratricidal fury aggravated by the arts of their two lady-loves. These sirens allegorise the "Two Extremes," and are contrasted with a third sister, Medina, or the "Golden Mean," who endeavours to bring the warring knights to concord. It is not from war that she dissuades them, but from unworthy war. According to Spenser's philosophy, man's condition is by necessity "militant

here on earth"; but the wars, like the loves of men, should have in them little in common with those of the inferior kinds. It was thus that Sidney wrote of "that sweet enemy, France." Rancour in the form of slander and detraction is here yet more severely judged than the most relentless war. It is the first offence punished in the temple of justice.

X The secret of human happiness, according to Spenser, is self-control, especially in the use of lawful things. It is that dignity in which man was created, and that belongs not to his spirit alone, but to its earthly tabernacle also, which, far more than any servile fear, binds him over to resist whatever that dignity condemns. The mandates of conscience constitute the true glory and beauty of the world we inhabit. They are "exceedingly broad"; and only in proportion as he rejoices in them while he obeys them, does man possess the "freedom of the city" in which he dwells. Lives ruled by these radiant and benignant laws advance through boundless spaces in security as well as swiftness, like the planets which move without collision through the heavenly regions because they are faithful to their prescribed orbits; while lawless lives break themselves against unseen obstacles, and fall helpless. This is the doctrine illustrated by the ninth canto of the second legend which describes the House of Temperance. When Guyon and Prince Arthur reach its gates, they find them barred against the attacks of a barbarous foe. Here we have one of Spenser's Irish experiences—

As when a swarme of gnats at eventide
 Out of the fennes of Allan doe arise,
 Their murmuring small trompetts sownden wide,
 Whiles in the aire their clustring army flies,
 That as a cloud doth seeme to dim the skies,
 Ne man, nor beast may rest or take repast
 For their sharp wounds and noyous iniuries,
 Till the fierce northern wind with blustering blast
 Doth blow them quite away, and in the ocean cast.¹

The foes at last dispersed—the emblems of the passions that besiege the soul—the gates of the castle are thrown open, and admittance is given to the knights by the princess who keeps state within.

Alma she called was, a virgin bright,
 That had not yet felt Cupides wanton rage ;
 Yet was she woo'd of many a gentle knight,
 And many a lord of noble parentage,
 That sought with her to lincke in marriage ;
 For shee was faire, as faire mote ever bee,
 And in the flowre now of her freshest age ;
 Yet full of grace and goodly modestee,
 That even heven rejoicéd her sweete face to see.

In robe of lilly white she was arayd,
 That from her shoulder to her heele downe raught,
 The traine whereof loose far behind her strayd,
 Branchèd with gold and perle, most richly wrought,
 And borne of two fair damsels which were taught
 That service well ; her yellow golden heare
 Was trimly woven and in tresses wrought ;
 No other tire she on head did weere,
 But crowned with a garland of sweet rosiere.²

Alma entertains her deliverers “with gentle court and gracious delight,” and, after they have rested, leads them all round her castle walls. Next she shows

¹ Book II. canto ix. stanza 16.

² Book II. canto ix. stanzas 18, 19.

A man of yeares, yet fresh as mote appere,
Of swarth complexion, and of crabbed hew,
That him full of melánocholy did shew ;
Bent hollow beetle brows, sharp, staring eyes,
That mad or foolish seemed ; one by his vew
Might deeme him borne with ill-disposed skies,
When oblique Saturne sate in th' House of Agonies.

The second chamber is painted over with the types of all that imparts dignity to state—magistracies, the tribunals of justice, the triumphs of sciences and arts. This is the kingdom of the Present ; and the sage who sits in it, a strong man of “ripe and perfect age,” though his wisdom has all come “through continual practise and usage,” represents practical judgment, and has for his kingdom the Present. The third sage symbolises memory, and the Past is his domain.

These three sages are, we are told, severally imperfect, because they dwell apart, each in a world of his own. Each makes too much of what occupies his special field of vision. The fault is that of disproportion, one closely allied to defective self-control. Neither imagination, judgment, nor memory, is fit to rule. These are but Alma's counsellors, each ministering a knowledge which becomes wisdom only when blent with the knowledge of the other two.

Next to a temperate will, the secret of a happy life, according to Spenser's philosophy, is a contented temper and that humility from which content springs. Such is the lesson taught to Calidore, the Knight of Courtesey, by the old shepherd Melibee. Happiness, he maintains, is from within, not from without—

It is the mind that maketh good or ill,
That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore ;

and for this reason he affirms, that those who earn their "daily bread" are the most fortunate. That the lowly condition, when at its best, does not exclude genuine refinement, is a lesson which Calidore learns from Pastorell, the supposed daughter of old Melibee, though in reality a maiden of high degree.

The quotations made above express Spenser's estimate of human life when, with its twofold capacities, it has neither risen above ordinary humanity nor fallen below it. It is an estimate in some degree founded on the ancient philosophy, with its "mens sana in corpore sano," and yet more on that spiritual teaching which regards man's estate as at once peaceful within and militant without: peaceful, because protected from the storms of passion and lawless ambition; militant, because a ceaseless war with evil is an essential part of our earthly probation. With those two conditions of human wellbeing Spenser blended another, viz. the constant presence of that high beauty which haunted him wherever he went, alike amid the splendour of courts and in lonely vales, and which he regarded as one of God's chief gifts to man. The spirit of beauty is ever accompanied in Spenser's poetry with the kindred spirits of gladness and of love—a gladness which has nothing in common with mere pleasure, and a love which rises far above its counterfeits. With him man's nobler affections are not mere genial impulses; they are themselves virtues girdling

in an outer circle those Christian virtues that stand around humanity, as, in Calidore's vision, the mountain nymphs encompassed those Three Graces who ministered to the rose-crowned maiden. The mode in which Spenser associated the virtues as well as the graces with his special idea of womanhood—an idea very remote from that common in our days—is nowhere more beautifully illustrated than in Book IV. canto x., where Scudamour describes the temple of Venus and the recovery of his lost Amoret.

Into the inmost temple thus I came,
Which fuming all with frankinsence I found,
And odours rising from the altars flame ;
Upon a hundred marble pillars round
The roof up high was reerèd from the ground,
All deck'd with crownes and chaynes and girlonds gay,
And thousand precious gifts worth many a pound,
The which sad lovers for their vows did pay ;
And all the ground was strewd with flowers as fresh as May.

In the midst stands on the chief altar the statue of the goddess to whom they sing a hymn. Round the steps of the altar sit many fair forms—

The first of them did seeme of riper yeares
And graver countenance than all the rest ;
Yet all the rest were eke her equall peares,
And unto her obeyed all the best.
Her name was Womanhood ; that she exprest
By her sad semblant, and demeanure wyse ;
For stedfast still her eyes did fixèd rest,
Ne roved at random after gazers guyse,
Whose luring baytes oftymes doe heedless harts entyse.

And next to her sate goodly Shamefastness,
Ne ever durst her eyes from ground upreare,
Ne ever once did looke from her dais,
As if some blame of evil she did feare,

That in her cheek made roses oft appeare ;
 And her against sweet Cherefulnesse was placed,
 Whose eyes, like twinkling stars in evening cleare,
 Were deckt with smyles that all sad humours chased,
 And darted forth delights, the which her goodly graced.

And next to her sate sober Modestie,
 Holding her hand upon her gentle hart ;
 And her against sate comely Curtesie,
 That unto every person knew her part ;
 And her before was seated overthwart
 Soft Silence, and submisse Obedience,
 Both linckt together never to dispart ;
 Both gifts of God not gotten but from thence,
 Both girlonds of his saints against their foes offence.

Thus sate they all around in seemly rate ;
 And in the midst of them a goodly mayd,
 Even in the lap of Womanhood there sate,
 The which was all in lilly white arrayd,
 With silver streames amongst the linnen strey'd ;
 Like to the Morne when first her shining face
 Hath to the gloomy world itself bewray'd,
 That same was fairest Amoret in place,
 Shyning with beauties light, and heavenly vertues grace.¹

Scudamour stands in doubt—

For sacrilege me seemed the church to rob.

Observing, however, a smile on the countenance of
 the goddess, he persists—

She often prayd, and often me besought
 Sometimes with tender tears to let her goe,
 Sometimes with witching smyles ; but yet for nought
 That ever she to me could say or doe
 Could she her wished freedom fro me move,
 But forth I led her through the temple gate.

It is easy to trace the same benignant philosophy
 in all these descriptions. The wisely led life is a life

¹ Book IV. canto x. stanza 52.

of truth, of simplicity, of justice, of human sympathy and mutual kindness, of reverence for humanity in all its relations, and of reverence for God. The unwise life is the opposite of these things.

But the ordinary human life, even when wisely led, constitutes in part only Spenser's ideal of human life. It includes an extraordinary portion, a mountain land ascending high above the limit of perpetual snow. This is the life which seriously aims at perfection, the life lived "from above," and of which faith and truth are not the regulative only, but the constitutive principles. It is set forth in the first Book and tenth canto of the *Faery Queen*. Una has discovered that the Red-Cross Knight, though zealous for the good, is as yet but scantily qualified by knowledge or strength for that enterprise on which he was missioned from the Faery Court. That he may learn goodly lore and goodly discipline, she brings him to "The House of Holiness." It is presided over by one who represents heavenly wisdom.

Dame Coelia men did her call, as thought
From heaven to come, or thither to arise ;
The mother of three daughters, well up-brought
In goodly thews and godly exercise ;
The eldest two most sober, chaste, and wise,
Fidelia and Speranza, virgins were,
Though spoused, yet wanting wedlock's solemnize ;
But faire Clarissa to a lovely fere
Was linkèd, and by him had many pledges dere.¹

At the gateway sits a porter, "Humiltà." Entering, Una and her knight find themselves in a spacious

¹ Book I. canto x. stanza 4.

palace court, whence "a francklin faire and free," by name Zeal, ushers them to a stately hall. There they are welcomed by "a gentle squire, hight Reverence."

We are next introduced to Coelia's daughters, Faith and Hope. Spenser describes them as Raphael would have done, had he painted in words—

Thus as they gan of sondrie things devise,
 Loe, two most goodly virgins came in place,
 Ylinked arme in arme in lovely wise ;
 With countenance demure, and modest grace,
 They numbred even steps and equall pace ;
 Of which the eldest, that Fidelia hight,
 Like sunny beams threw from her christall face
 That could have dazed the rash beholder's sight,
 And round about her head did shine like heaven's light.

She was arayèd all in lilly white,
 And in her right hand bore a cup of gold,
 With wine and water fild up to the hight,
 In which a serpent did himselfe enfold,
 That horror made to all that did behold ;
 But she no whitt did change her constant mood :
 And in her other hand she fast did hold
 A booke, that was both signd and seald with blood ;
 Wherein darke things were writt, hard to be understood.

Her younger sister, that Speranza hight,
 Was clad in blew that her beseemèd well ;
 Not all so chearful seemèd she of sight,
 As was her sister ; whether dread did dwell
 Or anguish in her hart, is herd to tell :
 Upon her arme a silver anchor lay,
 Whereon she leanèd ever as befell ;
 And ever up to heven, as she did pray,
 Her stedfast eyes were bent, ne swervèd other way.¹

A groom, Obedience, leads the youthful knight to the guest-house ; and the next day Fidelia begins to

¹ Book I. canto x. stanza 12.

instruct him in her sacred book "with blood
ywritt"—

For she was able with her wordes to kill,
And raize againe to life the hart that she did thrill.

And when she list poure out her larger spright
She would command the hasty sun to stay,
Or backward turne his course from heven's hight.

The knight waxes daily as in knowledge so proportionately in repentance; but Speranza teaches him to take hold of her silver anchor; and Patience, a kindly physician, pours balms into the wounds inflicted on him by Penance. He is next consigned to a holy matron, Mercy, that he may have a share in all her holy works. Mercy leads him into her great hospital—

In which seven bead-men that had vowed all
Their life to service of high heaven's king

initiate him, each into the duties which belong to his several function, the office of the first being to provide a home for the homeless, of the second to feed the hungry, of the third to provide raiment for "the images of God in earthly clay," of the fourth to release captives, of the fifth to tend the sick, of the sixth to inter the dead, of the seventh to take charge of the widow and the orphan. With all these sacred ministrations the knight is successively made acquainted, and thus fitted for a glimpse into the more exalted region of contemplation and the interior life.

Thence forward by that painful way they pass
Forth to a hill that was both steepe and hy,
On top whereof a sacred chapel was,
And eke a little hermitage thereby,

Wherein an aged holy man did lie,
That day and night said his devotion,
Ne other worldly business did apply ;
His name was heavenly Contemplation ;
Of God and goodnes was his meditation.

Great grace that old man to him given had ;
For God he often saw from heven's hight ;
All were ~~his~~ earthly eyen both blunt and bad,
And through great age had lost their kindly sight,
Yet wondrous quick and ~~permant~~ was his spright,
As eagle's eye that can behold the ~~sunne~~.¹

Hearing that the youth has been sent to him by Fidelia to learn "what every living wight should make his marke," the aged man shows him the Celestial City descending from heaven.

As he thereon stood gazing, he might see
The blessed angels to and fro descend
From highest heaven in gladsome companee,
And with great joy into that citty wend,
As commonly as friend does with his friend.²

The knight exclaims in ecstasy, "What need of arms since peace doth ay remain?" He is answered that his task must be accomplished before he is fit to enter into his rest ; but that notwithstanding, whilst labouring on earth, he is to be a citizen of the Heavenly City as well as of God's city on earth.

Such is that supernatural life, at once active and contemplative, which, according to Spenser's philosophy, admits of being realised even upon earth by its choicer spirits. Between the two lives there is much in common as well as much diversity. In each life man's course is a warfare : in the ordinary life

¹ Book I. canto x. stanza 47.

² Book I. canto x. stanza 56.

man has to fight against his own passions, and against all who would injure his fellow-man ; in the extraordinary life the combat is chiefly one for the establishment of a divine kingdom. In each the joy of life comes largely from beauty and from love ; but in the sublimer life both of these are spiritual things. In both lives fame is won, but only in the higher is it the direct voice of God. In both there is suffering, but in the higher pain works a loftier purification. Both lives have for their patrons Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa, with whom are conjoined that other triad, Humility, Patience, and Purity ; but those twelve virtues known of old are also ministering spirits to both lives, and belong to a cognate race ; while that great mother-Virtue, Reverence, the mystic Cybelè of the House of Virtues, is the connecting link between the two classes of virtues. The higher life is as superior to the lower as the statue is to the pedestal ; but that pedestal is yet hewn out of the same Parian marble. The ordinary human life, when wisely led, is thus the memorial of a more heroic life, once man's portion, and destined to be his again, and not the mere culmination of the life which belongs to the inferior kinds, as Epicurus esteemed it. Considered as a brief compendium of Christian teaching, at once doctrinal, practical, and contemplative, it would be difficult to excel this canto of the *Faery Queen*.

The sage tells the Red-Cross Knight that, though he knows it not, he is himself sprung from the race of England's ancient kings—

From thence a faery thee unweeting reft,
There as thou slep'st in tender swadling band,
And her base elfin brood there for thee left :
Such men do chaungelings call, so chaunged by faeries' theft.

According to Spenser's estimate, humanity itself is such a changeling, and perpetually betrays its lofty origin. Spenser's philosophy, both of the humbler and the more exalted human life, will be best understood when contrasted with the two chief forms of life depraved, as illustrated by him. A large part, perhaps too large a part, of his poem is given to this subject ; but it will suffice here briefly to sketch his general scheme of thought. Moral evil he contemplates in two aspects, that of the body insurgent against the soul, and that of the soul insurgent against its Maker, or passion on the one side and pride on the other. The former vice is rebuked chiefly in Book II., the Legend of Temperance, and the latter in the Legend of Holiness, or Book I. In the Legend of Temperance passion is exhibited in its two predominant forms of sensuality and ambition. The perils and degradations of an animalised life are shown under the allegory of Sir Guyon's sea voyage with its successive storms and whirlpools, its "rock of Reproach" strewn with wrecks and dead men's bones, its "wandering islands," its "quicksands of Unthrifthead," its "whirlepoole of Decay," its sea monsters, and lastly, its "bower of Bliss," and the doom which overtakes it, together with the deliverance of Acrasia's victims, transformed by that witch's spells into beasts. Still more powerful is the allegory of worldly ambition,

illustrated under the name of "the cave of Mammon." The Legend of Holiness delineates with not less insight those enemies which wage war upon the spiritual life. As the aims of that life are the highest man proposes to himself, so its foes are the most insidious. Una, the heroine of this legend, means Truth; and the first enemy with whom her knight has to contend is Error, a serpent woman, with her monstrous brood. A craftier foe assails him soon, the magician Archimago or Hypocrisy. Separated by him from Truth, the knight becomes subjected to Falsehood and Delusion, emblemed in Duessa, by whom he is lured to the House of Pride, the great metropolis of Sin in its most exasperated form, that of a spiritual revolt. He next becomes the thrall of Orgoglio, the giant son of Earth, or Pride in its vulgarer form of vain-glorious and animal strength.

In the latter legend the vices which make up the life of Pride, in the former those which make up the life of Lawless Sense, are illustrated with a keen insight and deep moral logic. In those two forms of evil life the three pagan champions, Sans-foy, Sans-loy, and Sans-joy, have a part corresponding with that which the Christian virtues, Fidelia, Speranza, and Charissa, sustain in the spiritual life. A certain symmetry, perhaps undesigned, always makes its way into Spenser's poetry. The philosophic Poet's mind is, indeed, by nothing more marked than by this unintended and often unconscious congruity in its conceptions, and the entire coherency of part with part in its

descriptions. Thence proceeds the harmony constantly found in Spenser's poetry, as long as he resists his unhappy tendency to allude covertly to the persons and events of his day, and deals in simplicity with the great ethical theme with **which** his genius had deliberately measured itself. Such harmony is the most **conclusive** proof that a poet does not write at random, but has both "a vision of his own," and a vocation to set it forth.

We have hitherto confined our attention to Spenser's philosophy of human life, first in its social and political relations, and secondly in those of a domestic or individual character. Occasionally, however, his philosophy makes excursions into regions more remote, and deals with subjects more recondite than these his favourite themes. To do justice to his genius we must note the two most remarkable of these excursions. Ten years after Spenser's death the first six books of the *Faery Queen* were republished with a fragment of the lost second part, consisting of "two cantos of Mutabilitie." In this fragment there is a simple largeness of conception, and a stern grandeur of expression, which suggests the thought that the later half of his work would probably have surpassed the earlier in mature greatness. It belongs essentially to Spenser's philosophic vein, and embodies a train of dark and minatory thoughts, though they issue gradually into light, on the instability of all things human—thoughts such as might naturally have presented themselves to a philosopher in an age when much

which had lasted a thousand years was passing away. In the remotest parts of Europe omens of change were heard, like those vague murmurs in the polar regions which announce the breaking up of the ice; and in Ireland unfriendly echoes of those voices muttered near and nearer around that ruined mansion, one of old Desmond's hundred castles, within whose halls some strange fortune had harboured the gentlest of England's singers. The "temple-haunting" bird ~~had indeed selected a "coigne of vantage,"~~ and hung there his "pendent bed and procreant cradle"; but he had been no "guest of summer," nor at any time had "heaven's breath smelt wooingly by his loved mansionry." It was from a securer abode, in the heart of the Rydalian laurels, that musings as solemn, though less sad, drew forth the dirge of the modern poet as he looked upon England's ruined abbeys—

From low to high doth dissolution climb,
And sinks from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes whose concord shall not fail.¹

The poet of Faery Land sees a prophet's vision ascending out of the cloud that rests on the pagan days. A Portent, not a god, but more powerful than the gods, and boasting a lineage more ancient, a child of Titan race, one more warlike than Bellona and more terrible than Hecatè, both of them her sisters, claims a throne higher than that of those later Olympians who had cast down an earlier hierarchy of gods. Her name is Mutability. She had witnessed their

¹ Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, Part III.

victory ; she had given it to them ; why should they not acknowledge her as their suzeraine ? On earth she had established her reign in completeness, and not over men alone. The seas had left dry their beds at her command, continents had sunk beneath the waves, mountains had fled like clouds, rivers had filled their mouths with desert sands, kingdoms had risen and fallen, and the languages which recorded their triumphs had died—

That all which Nature had establisht first
In good estate, and in meet order ranged,
She did pervert, and all their statutes burst.

Nor she the laws of Nature onely brake,
But eke of justice and of policie,
And wrong of right, and bad of good did make,
And death for life.

It remains for her but to reign in heaven as on earth—not in the majesty of a divine law, but in lawlessness become omnipotent. This Portent scales the heavens, making way at once to the most changeful of its luminaries, Cynthia's sphere.

Her sitting on an ivory throne she found,
Drawn of two steeds, th' one black, the other white,
Environed with tenne thousand starres around,
That duly her attended day and night ;
And by her side there ran her page, that hight
Vesper, whom we the evening starre intend ;
That with his torche, still twinkling like twilight,
Her lightened all the way where she would wend,
And joy to weary wandring travellers did lend.

Boldly she bid the goddesse down descend,
And let herself into that ivory throne ;
For she herself more worthy thereof weend,
And better able it to guide alone ;

Whether to men, whose fall she did bemone,
Or unto gods, whose state she did maligne,
Or to the infernal powers.¹

Cynthia scorns the intruder, and "bending her hornèd brows did put her back."

The Titaness raises her hand to drag the radiant and inviolate divinity from her seat. The result is narrated in a passage of marvellous sublimity. Dimness falls at once on that glittering throne and the "fire-breathing stars" that surround it; and, at the same moment, the eclipse reaches the earth, perplexing its inhabitants with fear of change, and ascends not less to the seat of the gods. They rush simultaneously to the palace of Jove,

Fearing least Chaos broken had his chaine.

The Father of the Gods reminds them that long since the giant-brood of earth had piled mountain upon mountain in vain hope to storm "heaven's eternal towers," and tells them that this anarchy is but the last offspring of that evil blood. While the gods are still in council, the strange Visitant is in among them. For a moment she is awed by that great presence; the next, she advances her claim. Jove had dethroned his father, Saturn; her own father, Titan, was Saturn's elder brother. On earth she has hitherto abode an exile, yet there she has conquered all things to herself. She demands at last her birthright—the throne of heaven. An inferior poet would have made this portent hideous as well as terrible. Spenser knew better. He knew that revolution and destruction

¹ Two cantos of Mutability, canto vi. stanzas 5, 6, and 9.

wear often on their countenances a baleful loveliness of their own, for which many a victim, disinterested in madness, has willingly died. The following lines are in Homer's grandest vein—

Whil'st she thus spake, the gods that gave good ear
To her bold words, and marked well her grace,
Beeing of stature tall as any there
Of all the gods, and beautiful of face
As any of the goddesses in place,
Stood all astonied ; like a sort of steeres,
'Mongst whom some beast of strange and forraine race
Unwares is chaunced, far straying from his peeres ;
So did their ghastly gaze bewray their hidden feares.

For Jove alone the Portent has no terrors—

“ Whom what should hinder but that we likewise
Should handle as the rest of her allies,
And thunder-drive to hell ? ” With that he shooke
His nectar-deawed locks, with which the skyes
And all the world beneath for terror quooke
And eft his burning levin-brond in hand he tooke.

But when he looked on her lovely face,
In which fair beams of beauty did appeare,
That could the greatest wrath soon turn to grace
(Such sway doth beauty, even in heaven, beare),
He staide his hand ; and having changed his cheere,
He thus againe in milder wyse began :
“ But ah ! if gods should strive with flesh yfere,
Then shortly should the progeny of man
Be rooted out ; if Jove should do still what he can.”

He bids her submit. The Titaness summons Jove to meet her before the tribunal of an impartial arbiter ; and by nothing does the poet more subtly impress us with the magic power of this strange claimant, than by the Thunderer's consent to leave his Olympian throne, and stand her co-suitor before an alien potentate.

That potentate is one whom our age challenges more often than Spenser's did. Her appeal is to the "God of Nature." The place of judgment is

Upon the highest heights
Of Arlo-Hill (who knows not Arlo-Hill ?)
That is the highest head in all men's sights
Of my old father, Mole, whom shepherd's quill
Renounèd hath with hymnes fit for a rural skill.

"Old Mountain Mole," a name as familiar as that of the river "Mulla," his daughter, to the readers of Spenser, designates the Galtee range which rises to nearly the height of 3000 feet at the north-east of Kilcolman. Arlo Hill is Galtymore, and overhangs the glen of Arlo, now spelt Aherlo. This mountain-range is here constituted by him a Parnassus of the north, and he tells us how that glen was long frequented by the gods, and especially by Cynthia, and how it was forsaken by the latter because she had there been betrayed by one of her nymphs, Molanna, while bathing in her favourite brook, to the gaze of "foolish god Faunus"—

Since which, those woods and all that goodly chase
Doth to this day with wolves and thieves abound ;
Which too, too true that land's indwellers since have found.

Those "thieves" were the original dwellers on Desmond's confiscated lands, who had taken refuge in the forests. There is a profound pathos in the last line quoted, one which may possibly have been written but the day before those wild bands issued from the woods of Arlo, and wrapped in flame the castle of its poet,

thus grimly closing the four wedded and peaceful years of his Irish life.

On the appointed day the gods assemble—the gods of heaven, of the sea, and of the land, for the infernal powers, we are told, might not appear in that sacred precinct, and not the gods alone but all other creatures. In the midst “great dame Nature” makes herself manifest. She is invested with attributes so mysterious, and tending so much towards the infinite, as to suggest the thought that Spenser, in some of his lonely musings, had occasionally advanced to the borders of a philosophy little guessed of in his own time. Some such philosophy has sometimes set up a claim like that of Spenser’s Titaness, and striven to push religion from her throne. According to Spenser’s teaching, those pretensions derive no countenance from Nature, though often put forward in her name. Nor was the cause of Mutability that of political revolution alone; it was also that of unbelief, of lawlessness against law, and of endless restlessness against endless peace.

“Then forth issewed (great goddess) great dame Nature,
With goodly port and gracious majesty,
Being far greater and more tall of stature
Than any of the gods or powers on hie;
Yet certes by her face and physnomy,
Whether she man or woman inly were,
That could not any creature well descry,
For with a veile that wimpled every where
Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.¹

Nature, we are told, is terrible, because she devours

¹ Canto vii. stanza 5.

whatever exists ; and yet beautiful, for she is ever teeming with all things fair. So far she resembles the Titaness, but only so far. The glory of her face is such that the face itself is never seen by mortal eye. To each man she is but as a semblance descried in a mirror. The soul of each man is that mirror, and according to what that soul *is* she *seems*. Her veil is never withdrawn.

That, some doe say, was so by skill devised,
To hide the terror of her uncouth hew
From mortall eyes that should be sore agrized,
For that her face did like a lion shew,
That eye of wight could not indure to view ;
But others tell that it so beauteous was,
And round about such beams of splendour threw,
That it the sunne a thousand times did pass,
Ne could be seen but like an image in a glass.

She sits enthroned upon the level summit of the hill,
and the earth instantaneously sends up a pavilion of
mighty trees that wave above her in adoration, their
branches laden with bloom and blossom ; while the
sod bursts into flower at her feet, and old Mole exults

As if the love of some new nymph late seene
Had in him kindled youthful fresh desire.

The Titaness draws near to this venerable being,

This great grandmother of all creatures bred,
Great Nature, ever young, yet full of eld,
Still moving, yet unmoved from her sted ;
Unseen of any, yet of all beheld ;

and appeals to her against the king of the gods,

Since heaven and earth are both alike to thee ;
And gods no more than men thou dost esteem :
For even the gods to thee as men to gods do seeme.”¹

¹ Canto vii, stanza 6.

The Titaness impeaches, not Jove only, but all the gods, for having arrogated to themselves, as divinities supernatural, what belongs to Nature only, and to herself as Nature's vicegerent. She insists that she has conquered to herself all the elements, not the land and the sea only ; for the fire does not belong to holy Vesta, nor the air to the queen of the gods, but both alike to her. She summons witnesses, and at the command of Nature her herald, Order, causes them to circle in long procession around the throne. First come the four Seasons, next the twelve Months. Here is one of the pictures—

Next came fresh April, full of lustihead,
And wanton as a kid whose horne new buds ;
Upon a bull he rode, the same which led
Europa floting through the Argolick fluds ;
His hornes were gilden all with golden studs,
And garnishèd with girlonds goodly dight
Of all the fairest flowers and freshest buds
Which th' earth brings forth ; and wet he seemed in sight
With waves through which he waded for his love's delight.¹

The Hours follow, and the pageant is closed by Life and Death.

The Titaness next turns to Nature, and makes, in the name of all who have passed before her, their common confession ; it is that all alike live but by change, and are vassals of Mutability. The Father of Gods and Men replies. His answer consists less in the denial of aught that is affirmative in her statement than in the supplying of what that statement had ignored—

¹ Canto vii. stanza 33.

Then thus 'gan Jove : " Right true it is that these
 And all things else that under heaven dwell
 Are chaunged of Time, who them doth all disseize
 Of being, but who is it (to me tell)
 That Time himselfe doth move and still compell
 To keepe his course ? Is not that namely Wee
 Which pour that virtue from our heavenly cell,
 That moves them all and makes them chaunged be ?
 So then we gods do rule, and in them also thee."

The reply of Mutability is simply an appeal from reason, interpreting objects of sense, to the mere senses when they have discarded reason—

But what we *see* not, who shall us persuade ?

Again she enumerates her triumphs, and demands a verdict in terms which surreptitiously remove the cause from the higher courts of Nature's judicature, and confine it to one created by herself. But Nature takes counsel not with eye and ear only, but with mind and spirit also—

So having ended, silence long ensued ;
 Ne Nature to or fro spake for a space,
 But with firm eyes affixed the ground still view'd.
 Meanwhile all creatures looking in her face,
 Expecting the end of this so doubtful case,
 Did hang in long suspense what would ensue,
 To whether side should fall the sovereign place ;
 At length she, looking up with cheerful view,
 The silence brake, and gave her doom in speeches few.

I well consider all that ye have sayd,
 And find that all things stedfastness doe hate
 And chaunged be : yet being rightly wayed,
 They are not chaunged from their first estate ;
But by their change their being do dilate ;
 And turning to themselves at length againe
 Doe worke their own perfection so by fate ;
 Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne,
 But they raigne over Change, and do their states maintaine.

Cease therefore, daughter, further to aspire,
And thee content thus to be ruled by me ;
For thy decay thou seek'st by thy desire ;
But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth none no more change shall see.
So was the Titanesse put downe and whist,
And Jove confirmed in his imperial See.
Then was that whole assembly quite dismist,
And Nature's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist.¹

According to the philosophy of Spenser it was impossible that Mutability should enjoy a final triumph, because her true function is to minister through change to that which knows no change. Revolution is but a subordinate element in a system which includes a recuperative principle, and tends ever to the stable. To the undiscerning eye things seem to pass away ; to the half-discerning they seem to revolve merely in a circle ; but the motion is in reality upward as well as circular ; as it advances, it ascends in a spiral line ; and as it ascends it ever widens. When the creation has reached the utmost amplitude of which it was originally made capable, it must then stand face to face with the Creator, and in that high solstice it must enter into the sabbath of His endless rest. Thus only could it reflect the Divine Perfection after which it was created. To understand this teaching, we must bear in mind its complement in another part of Spenser's philosophy. He held with Plato that all things great and abiding, whether in the material or the moral world, were created after the pattern of certain great ideas existing eternally in the mind of

¹ Canto vii. of Mutability, stanza 59.

the Creator, inseparable from His essence, and in it alone perfectly realised. Creation is thus a picture of the uncreated ; and the cyclical revolutions of time present an image of eternity, notwithstanding that the "opposition of matter" renders it impossible that that picture should ever be wholly faithful to its great original. Turning our eyes downward, we trace the same law in the descending grades of being. It is thus that man, himself the mirror of the Divine, is mirrored, though with a corresponding inferiority, by the inferior animals, which, not only in their chief affections, but in their intellectual processes, and often even in their social politics, rehearse, on a lower stage, parts which man is permitted to enact more nobly on a higher one. But between the creatures thus ranged on the lower and the higher stages of creation there exists one great difference : those only that occupy the highest platform possess the gift of secure progress. That progress is made through striving and pain :— the whole life of man here below, whether his individual or his social life, was regarded by Spenser as a noble warfare destined to end in victory and peace. Through such probation it becomes from age to age a vaster and a purer thing ; and its mutations, notwithstanding the confusions and the sufferings they entail, are but the means through which virtue ascends, and knowledge grows wider. Spenser ends his legend with this aspiration—

O that great Sabaoth God grant me that Sabbath's sight !
This is the voice of a spirit wearied with the storms

of our lower sphere, but not daunted or weakened by them. No one can read the last verse without joining in the poet's prayer.

These remarks on Spenser's philosophy would be incomplete without a reference to a very remarkable canto of his *Faery Queen*, in which he blends his musings on humanity with others on nature, and on what is higher than nature, and thus crosses the path of the old-world philosophic poet *Lucretius*, who also discoursed of nature and man's life—leaving in his philosophy a very little corner for the “immortal gods,” who seem, indeed, to have had little business there, and indeed to have been admitted but by courtesy. Spenser's philosophic reverie will be found in his *Garden of Adonis* (Book III. canto vi.) Human life as there described has nothing in common either with that higher, that ordinary, or that depraved form of life illustrated by him elsewhere. It is not an actual but a potential life, the conception of an existence neither fallen nor restored, and of an earth with neither benediction nor malediction resting upon it; an earth with one sorrow only—the transience of all things. The Garden is the domain of an endless productiveness, decay, and renewal. In it abide perpetually the archetypal forms of living things—

There is the first seminary
Of all things that are born to live and dye,
According to their kinds.

The ever-teeming soil is encircled by two walls, one of iron and one of gold—

And double gates it had which opened wide,
 By which both in and out men moten pas ;
 Th' one faire and fresh, th' other old and dried ;
 Old Genius the porter of them was,
 Old Genius the which a double nature has.

He letteth in, he letteth out to wend
 All that to come into the world desire ;
 A thousand thousand naked babes attend
 About him day and night, which doe require
 That he with fleshly weeds will them attire ;
 Such as him list, such as eternal fate
 Ordained hath, he clothes with sinful mire,
 And sendeth forth to live in mortall state,
 Till they agayn returne, back by the hinder gate.¹

Their condition is an endless alternation of glad life
 and painless decay.

After that they againe retourned beene
 They in that garden planted bee agayne,
 And grow afresh, as they had never seene
 Fleshly corruption, nor mortall payne :
 Some thousand yeeres so doen they there remayne,
 And then of him are clad with other hew,
 Or sent into the chaungeful world agayne,
 Till thether they return, where first they grew ;
 So like a wheele arownd they ronne from old to new.

Countless swarms perish successively, yet the stock is
 never lessened—

For in the wide wombe of the world there lyes
 In hateful darkness, and in deepe horrore
 An huge eternal Chaos, which supplies
 The substaunces of Nature's fruitful progenyes.

The substance is immortal ; the successive forms "are
 variable and decay," for though they have but one
 foe, with him they cannot contend. That enemy is

¹ *Garden of Adonis*, Book III. canto vi. stanza 32.

"wicked Time," who mows down all things with his scythe.

Yet pitty often did the gods relent
To see so faire things mard and spoilèd quight :
And their great mother Venus did lament
The losse of her deere brood, her deere delight.

Her realm has this sorrow alone. It is unshaken by jealousy or pain, doubt or shame. Over this central seat of her rolling sphere there rests "the stillness of the sleeping poles." Here the spring-tide and the harvest-tide blend, and the autumnal vine overhangs the vernal elm. Here grows

every sort of flowre
To which sad lovers were transform'd of yore.

Here Venus finds at will her lost Adonis where she laid him dead—

And sooth it seems, they say ; for he may not
For ever dye, and ever buried bee
In baleful night, where all things are forgot ;
All be he subject to mortalitie,
Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,
And by succession made perpetual,
Transformed off, and chaunged diverslie ;
For him the father of all formes they call ;
Therefore needs mote he live that living gives to all.

There are passages in this poem which remind the reader of Lucretius, but the contrast is greater than the resemblance. What in the Latin poet is a cynical, though imaginative, materialism becomes transfigured in the verse of one whose touch changes matter itself into spirit. The lower side of the philosophy receives its interpretation from the higher, and becomes,

though not the whole truth, yet a portion of it. If the seeds of all bodies spring up spontaneously from the fruitful soil, yet souls innumerable throng the air above them, and it is their breath that imparts life to their "fleshly weeds." If no gardener is needed there "to sett or sow," yet Nature only thus exercises a sacred might bestowed on her by one who is above Nature, and has commanded her to increase. Whatever she may be in Cythera or Paphos, the goddess of love is here a true "Venus Genetrix," a Power, compassionate and benign, the mighty mother bringing forth, not in sorrow but in gladness. A healing influence works on through creation; Nature is no more suffered to prey on her own offspring; the wild boar of the forest which slew Adonis, and ever wars on youth and strength, is "imprisoned in a strong rocky cave." In this earlier "Island Valley of Avilion," humanity heals its ancient wound, and awaits the better day. The spirit of hope here triumphs over the Lucretian spirit of despair.

The teaching of the pessimist philosopher of antiquity, whose ambition was to draw the most original of poems out of the wildest system of physics—like sunbeams extracted from cucumbers—was the opposite of this, except in points of detail. Not our world only but all worlds were fated to perish utterly, leaving behind them nothing but a whirl of atoms to fill their place; that is, they were to end like his own poem, which closes significantly with the plague at Athens. A few remarks will not here be out of place comparing

the great Latin philosophical poet, as he is commonly regarded, with the English philosophic poet of the Elizabethan period. Each of them found his country passing through a momentous crisis ; each must have largely affected its growing intelligence for good or for evil ; each had great poetic gifts, and in some respects similar gifts, for Lucretius, like Spenser, had an ardent imagination, a descriptive power till his time unrivalled, vivid imagery, impassioned eloquence, and remarkable gifts of style, diction, and metre ; and each united the courage with the perseverance needful for success in a high enterprise of song. (A poet is best understood when compared with another, at once like him and unlike.)

The great difference between the two philosophic poets lay in those moral and spiritual constituents of man's being by which the action of his imagination as well as of his understanding is secretly directed. In Spenser there lived an abiding spirit of reverence ; and therefore for him all phenomena received their interpretation from above : for Lucretius it came from below ; and his delight was to show how all great things are but small things making the most of themselves. The intellect of Spenser was a far-reaching one ; it descried the remote analogy ; it discerned what is lost alike upon the sensual heart and the merely logical intelligence ; it accepted high thoughts as authentic if at once recommended by venerable authorities and in harmony with universal aspirations, whether or not their nature rendered them susceptible

of dialectic proof. It could retain a serene faith when shrewdness winked and grimaced; and it could no less abstain from credulity when challenged by philosophic theories recommended chiefly by their strangeness and their confidence. Lucretius, on the other hand, had a vigorous but an animal intellect. He saw the wonderfulness of matter not more keenly than Spenser, who understood its witcheries perhaps but too well; but he was so dazzled by it that he could see nothing besides, and for him spirit did not exist. To him Nature was all in all; and for that reason he did not realise her highest greatness, viz. her power of leading to something higher than herself. To the Greek mythologists who had laid the basis of Greek poetry, Nature had been a divinity; to the Christian poet and philosopher she reflected a divine radiance; to Lucretius she was a Titaness slinging firebrands through the universe she had shaped, and shaping all things with no final aim but that of slaying them, and slaying herself on their pyre. For his guide he followed exclusively a single teacher of his own selection, and one even in the pagan world ill famed—Epicurus—passing by with contempt all the heads of the Greek schools during six centuries, and worshipping that one with an idolatrous but not disinterested devotion.

Seeing all things from below, Lucretius never grasps the nobler idea essentially included in each; he sees but the accidents that obscure it. In religion he sees nothing but fear; in authority but imposture; in man but animal instincts intellectualised. In

woman he sees no touch of womanhood. He advises his disciples never to meddle with so noxious a toy as love; but his mode of preaching self-restraint is worthless, since it provides no substitute for troublesome pleasures, either in lofty duties or in nobler joys, for which, on his principles, there remains no place. It is not merely that the Lucretian philosophy does not encourage moral or spiritual aspirations:—it is militant against them. It commands us imperiously to tread down the very desire of immortality; and yet its denial of immortality is a wholly illogical assumption, based on another assumption wholly arbitrary: viz. that “mind” and “soul” are but material things, not less than the body, and must therefore share the body’s doom. Such a philosophy, in recommending “moderation,” recommends but apathy; and men not dyspeptic or exhausted do not become apathetic to please philosophers.

There is nothing positive in Lucretius’s vivid appreciation of matter which does not find place equally in Spenser’s philosophy. What the latter abjures is the negative part of it. In Spenser’s poetry the creation is ever regarded as “the resplendent miracle,” and material joys as, in their degree, objects well worthy of pursuit and gratitude; but in that poetry under material enjoyment there ever lurk the humanities, and under these something greater still. It was but the narrowness of the Lucretian philosophy which made it identify a belief in matter with a disbelief in spirit—that narrowness which so often

explodes into fanaticism, with its combined characteristics of audacity and of intolerance. The Lucretian philosophy is an abject one, not because it failed to anticipate Truth then unrevealed, but because it denied and denounced truths which had been retained with more or less clearness by most of the early religions and by many philosophies, such as the spirituality of man's being, a Divine sanction to conscience, and the immortality and responsibility of the soul—beliefs which had, during sequent ages, created civilised societies with all that was best in their arts, poetry, and literature. Pagan antiquity had also retained the belief in a Providence that shaped man's life to gracious ends; and its Prometheus, a Titan though not a god, had endured as well as laboured for man. The Lucretian gods are material beings made, like the rest of the universe, by the "concurrence" of material atoms; and, like all besides, they are destined to perish. In the meantime they sit apart in festal rest, seeing in man's life, its joys, its agonies, its trials, nay, in all things external to themselves, nothing worthy of their interest. This is to make the gods not only after the image of men, but of the meanest among men. Spenser insists on a God who helps man, not because He is Himself man's image, but for an opposite reason:—on a God for whom, *since He is infinite* in all the dimensions of infinitude, it follows that as nothing is too great, so nothing is too small. There are those by whom that sublime idea is stigmatised as "anthropomorphism," while the Lucre-

x

tian conception is applauded as sublime. This is not sincere thinking. It cannot be justified by the qualification "sublime *as poetry*." Low sentiment and incoherent thought are not changed into great poetry because expressed in dignified language and good metre.

The materialistic philosophy on the exposition of which the poetry of Lucretius was wrecked made a large boast. In that aspect it has an important relation with our theme; for true poetry does great things, but does not make a great boast. It was to illuminate mankind, to break down all moral and intellectual thralldom, and to kill all religion, as the easiest way of curing its corruptions—a design as philosophic as though all government were to be destroyed because it includes administrative abuses; all art, because it sometimes ministers to depraved tastes; and all science, because its professors often make mistakes. How was this wonderful work to be effected? Not by experimental demonstrations—they are seldom appealed to by Lucretius, except in the way of demolishing counter theories—but by hardy scientific dogma, and the *pecca fortiter* of fearless assumptions. Atoms could neither be seen, felt, nor brought within the ken of scientific analysis; but it was easy to assume not only that they existed in incalculable number, but that they are of various shapes, solid, indestructible, possess weight, and even that their "uncertain sideways movement" is "the only possible origin of the free-will of living beings." So again of *Films*. These are slender veils cast, as Lucretius

affirms, from the surface of all objects incessantly and into all the regions of space—a valiant assumption, but one wholly fabulous. It is amusing to observe how the same philosophic credulity which accepts all assumptions condones all incoherences. The emancipating discovery asserts that “nothing comes from nothing”; yet it affirms also that, without any creative cause, there existed a perpetual downward rain of atoms; it believes that no Divine Mind gives law to matter; yet it maintains also that Nature’s course is uniform—nay, that a “concurrence of atoms” driven against each other in perpetual storm, eventually combined into all the wondrous forms on the earth—the structure of hand and eye, and brain! All that this philosophy regards as needed to justify its imperious claim on our acceptance is that its dogmas, however fantastic, should be *conceivable*, that they should be capable of being expressed in association with distinct *images*, or brain-pictures—things confounded by feeble thinkers with distinct thoughts—and that they should derive some plausible support from analogies. It asserts like one inspired: it multiplies instances, takes for granted its inferences from them—inferences which are but the preconceptions of a confident fancy—and thus eludes those troublesome questions on which the true issue of the argument depends. Drawn aside as if by an “elective affinity” towards the most materialistic views on all subjects, this philosophy hardily rejected even the material truths asserted, some five hundred years

before, by Pythagoras, such as that the earth moves round the sun, as well as its sphericity and gravitation—truths probably maintained by many in the days of Lucretius, though subsequently denied by the Ptolemaic system. It affirmed, moreover, that the universe is always dropping downward, and that the real size of the heavenly bodies is little more than their apparent size to the eye. Amidst these strange aberrations of a false philosophy, the “purple patches” of real poetry survive, to vex us with the thought of the poetry Lucretius might have given to us had Plato, not Epicurus, been his master, and to remind us that high genius is seldom extinguished wholly by the most wayward abuse of the gift.

It was fortunate for England that a philosophy in essentials the opposite of Lucretius's, inspired the poetry of that great man who opened the literature of the Elizabethan age, and into whose grave the younger poets of that age flung their pens, acknowledging him as their master as he had acknowledged Chaucer to be his. His genius might otherwise have exercised that influence, stimulating indeed, but both sensualising and narrowing, on English letters which Boccaccio certainly exercised on Italy, and for which no compensation could have been adequate. ✓Spenser's philosophy was ideal at once and traditional. It made no small points; but great ideas brooded over it. He did not boast himself as the great expositor of one self-chosen master. His humble pride was that his long-laboured work embodied the best moral teaching of the chief

masters both of antiquity and of Christian times. It was not a weapon of war. It derived no stimulus from hatred. It included within itself an unpretentious yet a coherent logic; but it passed far beyond her narrow pale in its genial strength, extending itself as widely as human sympathies, and soaring as high as man's noblest aspirations. That a poet so manifold in interest, and so profound in thought, should to so many readers, though not to the best, appear simply dull, and, again, that an ancient poet the greater part of whose poetry was devoted, like that of Dr. Darwin in the last century, to the versifying of Natural Philosophy, and whose Natural Philosophy was a chimera, should yet, with many readers, take the place often claimed for Lucretius, are phenomena hard to be explained. It is true that the adage "first come, first served," applies to books, and that many an old work retains a reputation which, if new, it could never acquire. It is true also that a compliment to a classic is often a compliment to one's own scholarship; and, again, that with, not a few, the lesser qualities of poetry, possessed in eminence, are more impressive than its highest qualities less energetically exerted. We may also, perhaps, in our attempt to solve the problem, find help in one of Spenser's best known allegories—best known because it illustrates so many a strange passage in human life—~~the~~ the allegory of Illusion or the witch "Duessa." She represents an idea constantly in the mind of Spenser. No poet ever fixed a more reverent gaze on philosophic truth,

or one more faithful to follow her "whithersoever she goeth," through the tangled labyrinths of thought or action. Yet no one felt so strongly how close beside her there treads an opposite spirit—a spirit potent alike to make the true seem false, and the false seem true, the fair seem foul, and the foul seem fair. Such is the magic power with which Duessa now reinvests her faded form with the loveliness of a youth long vanished, and now raises a mist and binds a mask of decrepitude on some beautiful rival.

It was no doubt the profound sincerity of Spenser's genius which made him muse with such a haunting sadness on that spirit of Illusion. He had had personal experience of its power. He had his own illusions, religious, political, and personal, several of which he had detected and repudiated. He had replaced the Puritanism of his early training with a form of Christianity half-Patristic and half-Platonic; although in his politics it still stretched itself, like a "bar sinister," across a shield glowing with loyalist "gules" and chivalrous devices. He had seen some of his nearest friends changeful in principle, but ever persistent in worshipping as divinities the idols of a fancy at once proud and servile. He had doubtless observed that there often exists a strange and cruel resemblance between opposites, and that the illusion is often the more complete the more absolutely they stand opposed to each other. It is thus that hypocrisy resembles virtue, and that, as a consequence, virtue may be easily mistaken for hypocrisy; that the vision-

ary is like the "man whose eyes are open," and *vice versa*; that bashfulness may be like guilt, and callous insensibility like innocence; that silence may betoken alike the fulness of content or an absolute despair; that, to the superficial, communism may seem the political realisation of the early Christian ethics of alms; that indifference to truth may claim to be the perfection of charity. The most fatal errors have ever been those which include in them high truths, though misapplied. Without that element they would not have proved attractive to elevated minds; and for an analogous reason the most exalted truths may long wear a form the most repulsive even to the good.

The dreadful power of illusion is a thought naturally brought home the most to minds at once reflective and imaginative. It was familiar to Shelley as well as to Spenser, unlike as were those two poets, and it is remarkably illustrated by him in the "Revolt of Islam," canto i. stanzas 25-27. In the beginning of things, as we are there told, "a blood-red comet and the morning star" hung in fight on the verge of Chaos. These two militant shapes are the rival powers of Evil and Good. Evil triumphs, and changes the morning star into a snake, which is sentenced to creep over the earth in that false semblance, abhorred by all, so long as the conqueror's reign endures. Transformations not less startling take place every day in the moral world. What is despicable when contrasted with that which is above it, may yet well appear admirable to one who can measure it only with what is below it.

Shelley, who had in him much of Lucretius's poetic audacity, was himself, for a short time, the prisoner of a materialistic philosophy as wild. When he became a translator of Plato, that grim skeleton, if it ever revisited his dreams, may perhaps have reminded him of Spenser's Düessa, stripped of her glittering apparel.

III

THE GENIUS AND PASSION OF WORDSWORTH ¹

THIS volume of selections is a pious labour, as it must have been a pleasant one, and it will prove a source of elevating delight to numberless readers. The late Dr. Arnold, to whom English education owes so much, was a near neighbour of Wordsworth during his summer vacations, as well as an intimate friend; and, in discharging a debt due to old friendship, his son has discharged another due to the youth of England. It was among them especially that the patriot poet, for such he justly claimed to be,² trusted that his poetry would serve that spiritual end for which he honoured and practised his art. Nor could that poet, whom Mr. Arnold recognises as the greatest belonging to modern England, receive this tribute more fittingly than from one who is himself a true poet. No ordinary

¹ *Poems by William Wordsworth.* Chosen and edited by Matthew Arnold. Macmillan and Co.

² See Wordsworth's Sonnet on being shown Dante's seat at Florence. 1837.

gifts are required in order to choose wisely among productions like Wordsworth's. In the case of a second class poet it is not difficult to make a selection at once just and popular, for to find his best poems it suffices to choose his most striking. It is otherwise when dealing with a poet of the first order. In him what we chiefly need is the characteristic. The poets of the highest order are, each of them, the regent of a distinct "Orb of Song," and in their respective kingdoms the poetic growths differ from each other as much as the Fauna and the Flora of remote climates. Their thoughts are crystallised on a different type, no matter what exterior force may be used to press them to the same shape; their feelings move according to a different law; their association of ideas is alien. What would be a fault in one may be a merit in another; what is essential in one is accidental in another; what in one is native, and full of significance, in another may be borrowed, and ornamental merely.

Landor affirms that "centuries are the telescopes which must be drawn out" before we can determine the magnitude or relative position of those great luminaries which shine upon us from the intellectual heaven. Half a century, however, may suffice to dispel many illusions. When Wordsworth's poetry first appeared, some careless readers fancied or pretended that genuine exponents of it were to be found in half a dozen short pieces, obviously little more than paradoxical protests, flung out, with some youthful exaggeration, against the literary convention-

alities of the time. Later a little patronising praise was vouchsafed, many of the poems being admitted to have a genial simplicity and a graceful pastoral vein, while occasionally it was conceded that their descriptions of scenery were good, and their moral tone unexceptionable. Still, however, the most original of our modern poets was looked on as one of a certain imaginary body called the "Lake School," as though he had no individuality of his own. The wonderful change of opinion which took place about fifteen or twenty years before his death was not caused by that later poetry which he published from time to time up to 1842. The great bulk of his writings, including all the most characteristic, had appeared by 1814. They were forced upon public attention, partly by the enthusiasm which they had created in a small but zealous band, among whom Coleridge was their earliest philosophic critic, and "Christopher North," their most unwearied champion, and in part, doubtless, by the vivacity with which they had been assailed; and, once attended to, time and their merits did the rest. During the interval, a philosophy of a more elevated order had superseded that of the last century; and, as a mountain is best descried from the slopes of an opposite mountain, so poetry of a high order is best discerned in its true proportions when contemplated from the heights of a spiritual philosophy. This change doubtless facilitated the acceptance of Wordsworth's poetry; but those who agreed in applauding it differed widely as to its character. By some Words-

worth was declared to be the great poet of Nature, and his meditative habit was condoned, though not approved; while by others he was praised as the profoundest of philosophic poets—a merit which atoned, they were pleased to say, for his absence of passion.

The following remarks relate chiefly to that high Passion which is one of the primary notes of his genius.

The chief characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry undoubtedly consists in the profound insight, wide sympathy, and vital force with which it presents to us Human Nature, not as disciplined by civil laws, or the accidents of life, but as elicited by the influences of external nature. It was social and political man that the great epic poets sang—men in nations and in armies, men marching to the siege of Troy or the recovery of Jerusalem. Wordsworth, too, had pondered such themes in youth, but he wisely put them aside; they could not be for him—he had another vocation. What he valued in man was the personal being, especially as developed within the first and inmost circle which girdles that personal being—the circle of the domestic affections. Within that circle there stood before his eye presences august and full of power. Beyond that circle, what he noted as most sacred and potent was the multitudinous, ever-varying imagery of that visible creation which had issued forth from under a Divine Hand not less than the spiritual creation, and which stands in such inexplicable yet subduing relations to the human soul. To him that creation was a mysterious thing, not the awless Arcady

of pastoral song, nor yet the embodied Nature of mythological bards. If in his earlier days there was, as some have said, in Wordsworth's appreciation of Nature a touch of what to a Greek would have become Pantheism, the northern poet was protected by a double talisman both from the artistic and the scientific snare. His imagination was of too spiritual an order to shape to itself material divinities, and his conscience bore witness to a Personal God, the Creator of all things, and the Judge of man. To that Personal God he paid dutiful reverence in life and song. Had he lost his hold of Religion he would have lost Nature also, for to him she would have been Nature no longer. As it was, in all her manifestations, whether in shape or in colour, in movement or at rest, from the most awe-inspiring of her forms to the most fugitive of her smiles, he recognised divinely-appointed ministers parleying with man's spirit, the quickeners of its finest impulses. How much the human mind conferred upon Nature, and how much Nature conferred upon the human mind, he did not affect to determine; but to each its function came from God, and life below was one long mystic colloquy between the twin-born powers, whispering together of immortality.

Such was the high theme, never before attempted, which Wordsworth saw daily widening more and more before his genius as the years of youth went by. Of himself he speaks as of

The *transitory* being who beheld
This vision,

and assuredly such a vision was a thing to make for itself a solitude in the heart of him who habitually gazed upon it. For him the chances and changes of civil life could not but seem trivial things. Man—at least so far as he is worthy of poetic illustration—must remain for him, as in the patriarchal days, a dweller in tents, one whose life was with God, with Nature, and with those nearest ties in creating which the mechanism of conventional society has no part. For him not less Nature must be much more than a mere gallery of landscapes. He must come to her as to a prophetess,¹ that he may incline his ear to her monitions, not as to an artist that he may admire and extol her skill. That such an enterprise of thought should be undertaken and sustained in a cold and passionless spirit is an allegation which, however often advanced, is incredible. The most impassioned enthusiasm could alone have suggested it, though one so habitual, and so tempered by the “philosophic mind,” as to remain undisturbed by the sallies of shallow passion. Such a theme must have proved too vast for the imagination detached from the rest of man’s faculties, and uttering a poor falsetto note of its own. It could be grappled with only by his whole being, in the union of all its intellectual powers, moral energies, and imaginative sympathies—a fusion and a blending which could itself only be effected by passion in its clearest ardour.

¹ Principal Shairp, in his admirable essay on Wordsworth, has well termed him the “Prophet of Nature.”—See his *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy*.

Passion was at the root of poetry in Wordsworth's conception of it ; his definition of poetry is—"Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge ; it is the *impassioned* expression which is in the face of all science."

Coleridge also, in his noble and pathetic lines addressed to Wordsworth, characterises his autobiographical poem expressly as—

A song divine of high and *passionate* thoughts
To their own music chanted.

Scientific men assure us that there exists a latent heat as well as a sensible heat. In all Wordsworth's high poetry there lives passion, and it is often stronger in its latent form than when most accumulated on the surface. By the admirers of his poetry it is ever felt at least, even if it be not consciously noted. Its absence would be immediately perceived ; and its presence can, without much difficulty, be demonstrated. The estimate of Wordsworth's poetry which I propose to illustrate is this—viz. not only that its chief characteristic is the power with which it simultaneously exhibits human nature and material nature in their mutual action and reaction, but also that in dealing with this his favourite theme, Wordsworth's genius, so far from being cold, an admission often made even by his admirers, is habitually under the influence of poetic passion in its rarest and highest forms. Wordsworth's poems are profound illustrations of the "Humanities." We are introduced into no region of moonlight fancies and dainty distresses. It is the broad, rough life of man that confronts us, not the life

of the sentimentalist ; its trials are those which come through the universal affections, neither sensualised on the one hand, nor sophisticated and volatilised on the other ; and their challenge reaches us through no euphuistic dialect, but the *volgare eloquenza* of natural speech. These are the trials which so many poets pass by, sometimes because they have no sympathy with such, but more often because they lack those strong and various powers which can alone delineate them. We have Ruth, the deserted bride—

Through dream and vision she did sink,
 Delighted all the while to think
 That on those lonesome floods
 And green savannahs she should *share*
*His board*¹ with lawful joy, and bear
 His *name* in the wild woods.

The English maiden's forecastings were not exactly those of a Juliet ; but only the very dull will conclude them to have been less tender. We have the deserted mother.

Ah ! little doth the young one dream,
 When full of play and childish cares,
 What power is in his wildest scream
 Heard by his mother unawares !
 He knows it not, he cannot guess :
 Years to a mother bring distress,
 But do not make her love the less.

We have the "Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman"—

My child ! they gave thee to another,
 A woman who was not thy mother.

¹ The italics are, with a few exceptions, my own throughout this paper.

When from my arms my babe he took,
On me how strangely did he look !
Through his whole body something ran ;
A most strange working did I see ;
As if he strove to be a man
That he might pull the sledge for me.

We have "The Brothers," the occult power of which is searchingly detected by Sir Francis Doyle in his Oxford Lectures on Poetry. He justly remarks that this poem is "not only exquisite in itself, but what is much rarer in Wordsworth, a masterpiece of dramatic and tragic power," a statement which he verifies by indicating the timid approximations by which the sailor, on his return, after many years, to the graves of his household, manages by slow degrees to draw out from the friendly clergyman that information about his brother which he fears to extort by a direct question, and after receiving which he can face his native vale no more.

To this class of Wordsworth's poems is to be referred the tale of Margaret, a poem never surpassed for profound ruefulness, but told with a grave moderation of language. A poor weaver and his wife have lived together long in peace—

Oh sir, the good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket. Many a passenger
Hath blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks,
When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn
From that forsaken spring ; and no one came
But he was welcome ; no one went away
But that it seemed she loved him.

Her character is thus described—

She was a woman of a steady mind,
 Tender and deep in her excess of love,
 Not speaking much, pleased rather with the joy
 Of her own thoughts; by some especial care
 Her temper had been framed as if to make
 A being—who by adding love to peace
 Might live on earth a life of happiness.

Bad seasons come; and the strong man feels the
 change more than his wife.

At his door he stood
 And whistled many a snatch of merry tunes
 That had no mirth in them; or with his knife
 Carved uncouth figures on the heads of sticks—

One while he would speak lightly of his babes,
 And with a cruel tongue; at other times
 He tossed them with a false, unnatural joy;
 And 'twas a rueful thing to see the looks
 Of the poor innocent children. "Every smile,"
 Said Margaret to me, here beneath these trees,
 "Made my heart bleed."

The ruined man, without the knowledge of his wife,
 enlists, and is sent to a remote land. She never sees
 her husband again. Months go by—

But when I entered, Margaret looked at me
 A little while; then turned her head away
 Speechless,—and sitting down upon a chair,
 Wept bitterly. I wist not what to do,
 Nor how to speak to her. Poor wretch! At last
 She rose from off her seat, and then,—O sir!
 I cannot tell how she pronounced my name:—
 With fervent love, and with a face of grief
 Unutterably helpless, and a look
 That seemed to cling upon me, she enquired
 If I had seen her husband.

Again months pass, and the narrator of the tale re-
 visits the forsaken wife. She is not in her garden.

From within

Her solitary infant cried aloud ;
Then, like a blast that dies away self-stilled,
The voice was silent.

At last she returns.

“I have been travelling far and many days
About the fields I wander, knowing this
Only, that what I seek I cannot find ;
And so I waste my time : for I am changed ;
And to myself,” said she, “have done much wrong,
And to this helpless infant. I have slept
Weeping, and weeping have I waked ; my tears
Have flowed as if my body were not such
As others are ; and I could never die.
But I am now in mind and in my heart
More easy ; and I hope,” she said, “that God
Will give me patience to endure the things
Which I behold at home.” . . .

It would have grieved

Your very soul to see her ; evermore
Her eyelids drooped, her eyes were downward cast ;
And when she at the table gave me food
She did not look at me. . . .

Her infant babe

Had from its mother caught the trick of grief,
And sighed among its playthings.

The years go by

Until her house by frost and thaw and rain,
Was sapped ; and while she slept, the nightly damps
Did chill her breast ; and in the stormy day
Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind.

In sickness she remained ; and here she died
Last human tenant of these ruined walls.

“Wordsworth’s poetry is great in thought, but scant in passion,” can surely not be said by persons acquainted with such passages as these. Passion is not appetite : it means profound and intense feel-

ing, addressed, first to all that relates to the human ties, and next to remoter objects, whether above or around us, so far as they can be coloured by human
 X imagination and emotion. Genuine poetic passion, when dealing with human themes, must show the depth and preciousness, nay, it must imply the infinitude, which belong to all the divinely-created bonds of earthly life, and should not exhaust itself, as is now so disproportionately common, upon a single form of love—that form the claims of which the readers of verse require least to be reminded of. “Love-Poetry” has been said to be “poetry ready made.” The great classic poets were never thus absorbed by a single theme. It is a sign rather of hard than of tender natures if they can be touched by the most fiery stimulants alone. That hardness may perhaps also account for the “sensational” character of many recent poems, written apparently in the belief that the reader’s heart, before it can feel, must have nails driven into it. In Wordsworth’s delineations of human nature, and the trials which at once task it and purify it, there is a pathos of a different kind. He never goes out of his way to find some form of suffering unheard of before ; but in his hands ordinary things become extraordinary, because he sees in them, and teaches his readers to see, depths and heights not suspected. The affections he sings are not the mere instincts of temperament brightened by a gleam of fancy ; nor have they their root in caprice, self-will, or self-love. They are those nobly-simple affections out

of which Nature has built up human society, and which live in the light of duty.

In this poem there are no far-fetched thoughts, but it is thoughtful throughout ; no emotional spasms, but a profound pathos swelling in volume to the close. The imagination which belongs to it is not that which exhausts itself in glittering images, but that which moulds the various elements of a poem into a unity, and thus causes the impression which it leaves behind to be a total and masterful impression. The diction x is in perfect accord with the poem. It never draws our attention, as self-conscious and ostentatious art does, from the matter to the manner. It is picturesque, because the true poetic mind is observant as well as reflective, not because it deems a thought worth nothing unless when capped by a picture. Those who delight exclusively in the more elaborate and luscious diction of a later day may think it often inartistic ; but its art consists in the skill with which the poet enhances the refined and the elevated by making them rise from the level of the simple. In his more important poems Wordsworth's diction, like his metre, ever advances in power and dignity proportionately to the x thought and emotion it has to sustain. He seems to have included it in the judgment which he pronounced upon poetry itself—

Which, if with truth it correspond, and *sink*
Or rise, as venerable Nature leads,
 The high and tender Muses shall accept
 With gracious smile deliberately pleased,
 And listening Time reward with sacred praise.

X In his first efforts Wordsworth was doubtless somewhat too much of a radical reformer as regards the abuses which had long corrupted language. His remarks on that subject seemed to assume that the language of common life which he recommended for poetical purposes differed little from that of good prose writings, a statement to which there are many exceptions. He did not succeed in *thus* substituting the language of common life for poetic diction; but he did a much better thing. He dug deep into the ore of manly thoughts, and finding there a corresponding tongue, both new and true, he blew away the dry dust of conventionalities and affectations, and replaced a false poetic diction by a genuine one.

The "Solitary" is a husband deprived by death of her who had been all to him; and, as might have been expected, the earlier poem is the feminine, the later is the masculine of distress. But in the earlier the sufferer is blameless; in the later, suffering is aggravated by intellectual error and moral guilt; and, as a consequence, while the spirit of the former poem is that of profound pathos, the latter is tragedy in its most terrible form—that of remorse.

The "Solitary" has been in youth the chaplain to a Highland regiment, but with little fitness for the ministerial charge. Years of happiness have been accorded to him; but he has become the widowed and childless tenant of a lonely hut beneath the I gdale Pikes. His silent grief breaks out at

v ds—

You never saw, your eyes did never look
 On the bright form of her whom once I loved ;
 Her silver voice was heard upon the earth,
 A sound unknown to you ; else, honour'd friend,
 Your heart had borne a pitiable share
 Of what I suffer'd when I wept that loss,
 And suffer now, not seldom from the thought
 That I remember and can weep no more.

This fair bride,

In the devotedness of youthful love,
 Preferring me to parents, and the choir
 Of gay companions ; . . .

This bride,

Young, modest, meek, and beautiful, I led
 To a low cottage in a sunny bay,
 Where the salt sea innocuously breaks
 And the sea-breeze as innocently breathes
 On Devon's leafy shores.

Nothing seems wanting. Old revels and old
 troubles have alike become to him as a dream. Two
 children are added to the household hearth.

On these two pillars rested as in air
 Our solitude.

But it is the calm before the storm—

O ! tremble ye to whom hath been assigned
 A course of days composing happy months,
 And they as happy years ; the present still
 So like the past, and both so firm a pledge
 Of a congenial future that the wheels
 Of pleasure move without the aid of hope,
 For mutability is Nature's bane ;
 And slighted hope will be avenged ; and when
 Ye need her favours ye shall find her not ;
 But in her stead fear—doubt—and agony !

In rapid succession the girl and the boy are

snatched from them. The falling in of a roof-tree is told as perhaps it was never told before.

Calm as a frozen lake when ruthless winds
 Blow fiercely, agitating earth and sky,
 The mother now remained ; as if in her
 Who to the lowest region of the soul,
 Had been erewhile unsettled and disturbed,
 This second visitation had no power
 To shake, but only to bind up and seal,
 And to establish thankfulness of heart
 In Heaven's determinations ever just.
 The eminence on which her spirit stood
 Mine was unable to attain. Immense
 The space that severed us ! But as the sight
 Communicates with heaven's ethereal orbs
 Incalculably distant, so I felt
 That consolation may descend from far
 (And that is intercourse and union too),
 While, overcome with speechless gratitude,
 And with a holier love inspired, I looked
 On her—at once superior to my woes
 And partner of my loss. O heavy change !
 Dimness o'er this clear luminary crept
 Insensibly : th' immortal and divine
 Yielded to mortal reflux ; her pure glory,
 As from the pinnacle of worldly state
 Wretched ambition drops astounded, fell
 Into a gulf obscure of silent grief,
 And keen heart-anguish—of itself ashamed,
 Yet obstinately cherishing itself :
 And, so consumed, she melted from my arms ;
 And left me on the earth disconsolate.

The earlier season of bereavement inherits a past
 which had only feigned to die.

I called on dreams and visions to disclose
 That which is veiled from mortal thought ; conjured
 Eternity, as men constrain a ghost
 To appear and answer ; to the grave I spake
 Imploringly ; looked up, and asked the heavens

If angels traversed their cerulean floors,
 If fixed or wandering star could tidings yield
 Of the departed spirit—what abode
 It occupies—what consciousness retains
 Of former loves and interests. Then my soul
 Turn'd inward, to examine of what stuff
 Time's fetters are composed ; and life was put
 To inquisition long and profitless !
By pain of heart now checked—and now impell'd
The intellectual power, through words and things,
Went sounding on a dim and perilous way !

A worse bereavement follows. His religious faith, never fixed, breaks away from him—no uncommon consequence when the lessons of sorrow have been spurned. The pageant of the French Revolution bursts upon his night. He wakens out of the trance of grief

As a shepherd by a flash
 Of lightning startled in a gloomy cave.

In the destruction of creeds and of thrones he sees the redemption of the world, and becomes a fanatical propagandist of that insane hope which stands up alone among the ruins of dead belief. At the moment, the loss of faith is felt not as a loss, but as a deliverance—a circumstance easily explicable. His faith had in reality been subverted at an earlier period. The mast had long been trailing beside the ship ; and when it was cut away the hulk righted.

Thus was I reconverted to the world ;
 Society became my glittering bride,
 And airy hopes my children.

The disenchantment followed soon : the predicted "Triumph of Life" had changed into the old "Dance

of Death"; and despair but drives him to illustrate in lawless life the wild principles he had preached in reference to the political order—

And propagate by liberty of life
Those new persuasions. Not that I rejoiced
Or even found pleasure in such vagrant course
For its own sake; but farthest from the walk
Which I had trod in happiness and peace,
Was most inviting to a troubled mind
That in a straggling and distemper'd world
Beheld a cherished image of itself.

France having failed him, he flies to America.

But, ye powers
Of soul and sense—mysteriously allied,
O never let the wretched, if a choice
Be left him, trust the freight of his distress
To a long journey on the silent deep!
For like a plague, will memory break out,
And, in the blank and solitude of things,
Upon his spirit, with a fever's strength,
Will conscience prey. Feebly must they have felt
Who, in old time, attired with snakes and whips
The vengeful furies. *Beautiful* regards
Were turned on me—the face of her I loved—
The wife and mother—pitifully fixing
Tender reproaches insupportable.

In the cabin of the ship there lay a Bible, but he can now make nothing of it; and in his hut among the Cumberland mountains, the only book is a novel of Voltaire's. In it he finds small help; and in his own meditations as little.

Ah! what avails imagination high
Or question deep? What profits all that earth,
Or heaven's blue vault, is suffer'd to put forth—
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If neither in the one
 Nor in the other region, nor in aught
 That fancy, dreaming o'er the map of things,
 Hath placed beyond these penetrable bounds,
 Words of assurance can be heard—if nowhere
 A habitation for consummate good
 Or for progressive virtue by the search
 Can be attained, a better sanctuary
 From doubt and sorrow, than the senseless grave.

The issue of this spiritual strife the poet remanded to the later portion of his great poem. It was never written. Who, alas, shall

Call him up who left half-told

a story touching deeper interests than that of "Cambuscan old"? What constitutes the profound interest of this poem, and of "Margaret"? It is the simple power with which they sound the depth of the humanities. The characters are absolutely true to nature. The worst sorrows of the Solitary's life are but his character itself externalised, that character within which the incidents of his early life, when all seemed bright and fair, were still working on unperceived. The characters that Wordsworth loves to describe he knows with a Shakespearean insight, though between his manner of illustrating them, and Shakespeare's, there is that immeasurable diversity which must ever exist between the dramatic method and any other form of poetry.

My immediate theme is this—viz. that while many of those who have praised Wordsworth, whether as a philosophic or as a descriptive poet, have yet charged him with an absence of passion, the truth is, that no

quality belongs to his poetry more eminently—if we exclude from passion all that might more properly be termed either sensuous instinct or sensational energy of phrase, and if we regard passion rather as it exists in its profounder form, and expresses itself with its subtler strength, than as it is manifested in its coarser and more ordinary appeals. In the poems quoted it must be conceded that passion is found in a singularly concentrated and manifold form—unless it can be proved that moral passion is a thing impossible. While analysing the Greek drama, which made the delineation of passion its purpose to a degree which the pleasure-loving Athenian would not have tolerated outside the tragic theatre, Aristotle affirmed that the end of Tragedy was to purify man's heart through pity and terror. What has thus a moral end must be itself moral in essence. It is remarkable that in many of his poems Wordsworth is far more dramatic, and therefore more impassioned, than in his youthful drama *The Borderers*. It is in his "Margaret" that our "pity" is most deeply moved, while in "The Solitary" there is far more of the "terrible"; but in both instances the passion delineated has the same tendency—viz. to purify the heart while enlarging it, not to cloud the understanding or to confuse the moral principles. In both instances the trial carries with it something soul-searching and divine. The clowns of poetry delight to illustrate sorrow, of all things the most sacred, after a fashion immoral and seditious. Their aim is apparently to suggest that

the world is all wrong, and its Creator an evil Power such as was imagined by the Manicheans. For the sigh of sorrow they substitute an upbraiding wail, or a shout of defiance which the Pagan Greek would have regarded as profane. Even in his earlier poems Wordsworth, on the contrary, illustrates a principle affirmed in one of the latest among them, in which he commends alone that poetry

Whose spirit, like the angel that went down
Into Bethesda's pool, with healing virtue
Informs the fountain in the human breast
That by the visitation was disturbed.¹

In his song, calamity, even when it does not advance upon the tragic scene as a divine messenger, never springs upon it like a wild beast or a demon. It makes its approach in veiled majesty, bearing in one hand the penance and in the other the peace. If the modern mind associates passion chiefly with pleasure, it is no wonder that it does not easily recognise that passion which comes forward as a minister of virtue, and does not shrink from pain. Wordsworth was the more able thus to illustrate passion in its relations with sorrow, because the general view which he takes of human life is eminently a cheerful one—so cheerful, indeed, that he can well afford to allow the shadow to intermingle with the light. Throughout his poetry man's heart, with its countless sympathies and boundless capacities for pleasure and for pain is represented (and this is one of the points of re-

¹ Lines suggested by a portrait by F. Stone.

semblance between Wordsworth and Shakespeare) as a thing so vast, and swelling with vital emotion so strong, that whatever its trials, it can never be crushed. It has nothing of that hard lightness which belongs to the epicurean.¹ Its sensibilities are, indeed, so fine that it must needs suffer much, but its elasticity is greater, and therefore in its rebound it must ever throw off suffering, and confess that all things round us are "full of blessings."

Let us pass to passion in its milder form—pathos. Pathos is a characteristic of nearly all Wordsworth's memorable poems, but the tears which it brings to the eyes are often tears of gladness strangely mingled with regret—

The sighs which Matthew heaved were sighs
Of one tired out with fun and madness ;
The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
Were tears of light, the dew of gladness.

Yet oftentimes, when the secret cup
Of still and serious thought went round,
It seemed as if he drank it up—
He felt with spirit so profound.

The two poems on "Matthew" are admirable specimens of Wordsworth's pathos in its most usual form—

¹ In his well-known essay on Wordsworth's Sonnets, Sir Henry Taylor has pointed out the difference between that strength which is included in the poetical temperament and that which is opposed to it. "It is true that nothing can be more unpoetical than a strong and vivacious spirit which is also hard and selfish ; and it may be true that this is a common combination ; but it is the uncommon combination of great susceptibility and tenderness, with not less of strength and vivacity, which makes the truly poetical temperament" (Sir Henry Taylor's *Works*, vol. v. C. Kegan Paul, 1878).

In silence Matthew lay, and eyed
The spring beneath the tree ;
And thus the dear old man replied,
The grey-haired man of glee :

Down to the vale this water steers,
How merrily it goes !
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.

And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot choose but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.

My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.

Thus fares it still in our decay :
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind.

My days, my Friend, are almost gone,
My life has been approved,
And many love me ; but by none
Am I enough beloved.

To this category we may refer such poems as the three on Yarrow, "The Solitary Reaper," "To the Cuckoo," "Tintern Abbey," "Animal Tranquillity and Decay," "A Farewell," "The Small Celandine," the poems on the daisy, "A Poet's Epitaph," "Simon Lee, etc." One of the most remarkable circumstances connected with this class of poems is that so many of them should have been written in youth. Genius is said to retain youth in age ; but many of Wordsworth's early poems make us think that his youth had often

pleased itself by anticipating age, so frequently is the strain characterised by retrospective thought and a gentle pensiveness. A large proportion of these poems were produced between his twenty-sixth and thirtieth year. One of the most pathetic among them, "The Old Cumberland Beggar," a very early poem, is a striking specimen of this sympathy of youth with age.

He sat, and ate his food in solitude :
 And ever, scattered from his palsied hand,
 That, still attempting to prevent the waste,
 Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers
 Fell to the ground ; and the small mountain birds,
 Not venturing yet to peck their destined meal,
 Approached within the length of half his staff.

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head !
 And while in that vast solitude to which
 The tide of things has borne him, he appears
 To breathe and live but for himself alone,
 Unblamed, uninjured, let him bear about
 The good which the benignant law of Heaven
 Has hung around him ; and, while life is his,
 Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
 To tender offices, and pensive thought.
 Then let him pass, a blessing on his head !

Be his the natural silence of old age !
 Let him be free of mountain solitudes ;
 And have around him, whether heard or not,
 The pleasant melody of woodland birds.
 Few are his pleasures ; if his eyes have now
 Been doomed so long to settle on the earth
 That not without some effort they behold
 The countenance of the horizontal sun,
 Rising or setting, let the light at least
 Find a free entrance to their languid orbs.

And let him, *where* and *when* he will, sit down
 Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank
 Of highway side, and with the little birds
 Share his chance-gathered meal, and, finally,
 As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
 So in the eye of Nature let him die !

Before a poet can afford such sympathy as this with all the lighter as well as heavier troubles of humanity, he requires to possess not only a happy temperament, but a strong one. The weak sympathise but with the weak, and weaken them more by such sympathy. There is, on the other hand, nothing that more characterises Wordsworth's poetry than its veneration for the manlier virtues. It bestows its sympathy most upon those by whom self-pity is least known. His favourite virtues are the severer ones ; and the women as well as the men he delineates are not alone remarkable for sincerity, justice, independence, and endurance, but for such eminently English qualities as industry and frugality. These are not showy qualities, but they imply self-denial ; and Wordsworth's poetry delights to graft the softer virtues on the harder stock. The Laureate tells us—

That bright, and fierce, and fickle is the south,
 And dark, and true, and tender is the north.

Wordsworth's poetry is essentially that of the north, with its clouded skies and tender atmospheric effects ; and it reminds us that a softer leaf buds from the heart of oaks than from the olive and the palm of lands which "eternal summer gilds." What is it that makes the pathos of "Michael," that rocky idyll of the northern

hills? Its robustness. We know nothing of the shepherd till he is old—

An old man, stout of heart and strong of limb,
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength ; his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs.

But that strong old heart has tenderness in it. For many years that tenderness has been chiefly spent upon the small patrimony which, during successive centuries had descended to him from his brave and humble forefathers, and which forty years of pious toil have at last cleared from debt. Dearly has he loved those hills and fields—

Which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind,
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear ;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain.

At last, and beyond hope, a child is born to him.

To Michael's heart
The son of his old age was yet more dear—
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Blind spirit which is in the blood of all—
Than that a child more than all other gifts,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.

The old man and his son are inseparable companions until the latter has reached his eighteenth year. Then calamity falls upon the mountain home ; a kinsman has failed in business, and Michael, who had gone security for him, finds himself liable for the debt.

“Isabel,” said he,
 “I have been toiling more than seventy years,
 And in the open sunshine of God’s love
 Have we all lived ; yet if these fields of ours
 Should pass into a stranger’s hand, I think,
 That I could not lie quiet in my grave.”

occupied with other matters may be excused if he is of their number. In 1801 Wordsworth sent a presentation copy of his *Lyrical Ballads* to Mr. Fox, stating that he did so on account of two poems which they included—viz. “The Brothers” and “Michael.” His letter expresses a deep regret for the “rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society, even among the hardy mountaineers of the north,” and states various causes, social and political, which tended to accelerate that decay. We count the eighteenth century a cold and prosaic one ; notwithstanding, this letter shows that many very sacred affections, of which a memorial at least survives in Wordsworth’s verse, held their own during that period. In a short and complimentary answer the statesman informs the poet that he has read those two poems “with particular attention,” but does not find much in them, naming at the same time four poems as his favourites, two of which are “Harry Gill” and “The Idiot Boy.”¹

But of all Wordsworth’s poems which illustrate the union of the strong and the touching, the most remarkable is, “The Leech-Gatherer,” or “Resolution and Independence.” We meet in this poem a greater and more plastic imagination than in any other belonging to the same category ; while at the same time the poet yet more strongly enforces the great truth that there exists something higher than the highest imagination—viz. the heroic heart which perseveres in duty to the last, no matter under what difficulties, and

¹ *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, by Dr. Wordsworth.

never suspects its own greatness. The moral comes out with the greater power because it comes out apparently without design. Two very different characters are brought face to face in the most striking contrast ; and the one of many gifts is not the one to impart, but to receive, the lesson. The poem has been conceived as a whole, and for that reason the happiest harmony exists between its parts, and especially between the aspects of nature and the movements of the human mind, as successively presented. It has been a night of tempest ; but with the sunrise Nature suddenly changes her mood ; the birds sing ; the air is filled with the music of the flooded rivulets ; the grass is bright with the last drops of the exhausted tempest ; and the hare runs races on the wet moors, pursued by the mist that rises from beneath her feet. The poet catches the inspiration of the morning, and soars into a kindred ecstasy ; but, inconstant as that Nature of which he is the servant, his mood changes. Exhausted by its own energies, his spirit drops from its height into a gulf of blind perplexities. There falls upon him a piercing thought—the contrast between Nature's creatures, bird and beast, of whom she takes care, and man, the being who "looks before and after" ; whose very greatness is an exacting power ; who is charged with the weight of his own destinies ; who has duties as well as instincts, responsibilities no less than thoughts ; who must sow if he would reap ; who must discharge, not only high offices for others, but also the humblest for himself ; and who, until he has discharged

them, has not earned the privilege of forgetting himself, because such forgetfulness must keep him in a position of dependence on others, or of subjection to chance.

I thought of Chatterton ; the marvellous boy,
The sleepless soul that perished in his pride ;
Of him who walked in glory and in joy
Following his plough, along the mountain-side ;
By our own spirits we are deified ;—
We poets in our youth begin in gladness ;
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.

As the poet stands arrested in the cloud of heavy thought, he sees, not far off, a man—

Beside a pool bare to the eye of Heaven
I saw a man before me unawares ;
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

But he sees him as in a dream : his eye has long been resting, first on visions of glory, and next on visions of bale ; and now, when an old man stands before him—a living man—he seems to the poet as something seen “in Visions of the Lord.”

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence,
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence ;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense ;
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposest, there to sun itself.

Such seemed this man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep in his extreme old age ;
His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life's pilgrimage ;
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

Himself he propped, his body, limbs, and face,
 Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood ;
 And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
 Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth all together if it move at all.

To the poet's question why in his extreme old age he faces those lonely moors all alone, the old man makes answer, "from a feeble chest," but courteously, and with words each succeeding each "in solemn order." His tale includes no demand for help. When he became old and unfit for labour he had found another way by which he could still provide "an honest maintenance." He had become a gatherer of leeches, and wandered on from pond to pond, from moor to moor, to find them—housing where he might. It was no chivalrous "Quest"—no martyr's sacrifice. It was that humblest of manly duties which a man owes to God after his life has long ceased to be of value to himself or others ; but it was discharged without self-pity, and without fear.

The longer the poet listens the stranger seems to him this mystery of power in the midst of decrepitude, a power, so unlike his own ; and the more visionary becomes the scene.

The old man still stood talking by my side,
 But now his voice to me was like a stream
 Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;
 And the whole body of the man did seem
 Like one whom I had met with in a dream ;
 Or like a man from some far region sent
 To give me human strength by apt admonishment.

Yet strength it does not give him : he has long been
a dweller in the world of thought ; and he has not
yet discerned that what stands before him is reality.

My former thoughts returned ; the fear that kills ;
And hope that is unwilling to be fed ;
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills ;
And mighty poets in their misery dead.
Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
My question eagerly did I renew,
“ How is it that you live, and what is it you do ? ”

He with a smile did then his words repeat ;
And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide
He travelled ; stirring thus about his feet
The waters of the pools where they abide.
“ Once I could meet with them on every side ;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay ;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may. ”

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old man's shape and speech, all troubled me ;
*In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,*
Wandering about alone and silently.
While I these thoughts within myself pursued,
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main ; and, when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit man so firm a mind.
“ God,” said I, “ be my help and stay secure ;
I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor ! ”

It is only a very superficial reader who can see in
this poem nothing but natural description and a moral
purpose. The poem is passion also, and passion in
his highest form—the passion of the intellect and of
the spirit in their soarings and sinkings ; the passion

of the imagination that moulds all the aspects of nature, so as to be the mirror of its own varying moods, now making to itself palpable monitors out of her most casual aspects, now resolving her plainest objects into dream that it may walk unembarrassed through worlds as visionary as its own. It is the fusing power of passion which imparts to this poem its perfect harmony of colouring, and converts into a spirit-moving reality that which, had its inner meanings proceeded from the didactic intellect alone, must have presented itself with all the coldness that belongs to allegory. The language is throughout the language of passion—not declamatory passion, but passion steadied by its own weight; and in its Doric simplicity, almost roughness, it suits the theme far better than the polished diction of “Laodamia” or “Dion” would have done. As these two poems represent Wordsworth’s poetry in its occasional classical vein, and as his “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality” exemplify it in its highest philosophical flights, so his “Resolution and Independence” may be regarded as the most powerful example of that earlier style characterised by robustness, brooding meditation, and truth at once to nature and to passion. Pre-eminently also does it illustrate the fact which I began by insisting on—viz. that the principal theme of Wordsworth’s poetry is man, not so much social man as personal man, and man as moulded by the great influences of Nature, the foster-mother of his spirit. Such was the character claimed for his poetry in the

magnificent lines composed by Coleridge after his brother-bard had finished the recitation of his poem on the "Growth of an Individual Mind."

That prophetic lay,
Wherein (high theme by thee first sung aright)
Of the foundations, and the building up
Of a Human Spirit, thou hast dared to tell
What may be told, to the understanding mind
Revealable. . . .

Of moments awful,
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
The light reflected, as a light bestowed.

It was the movements of nature in tempest and in calm that had kindled alike the rapturous mood and the despondent mood described in "Resolution and Independence"; and if the poet subsequently recognised in the "decrepit" man before him, bent double by age, a "stately" monitor "from some far region sent," it was because he gazed on that feeble form with that *creative* eye which he had ever bent upon Nature, and because he had received from both alike "the light reflected" of his own intelligence, as "a light bestowed."

It is not without cause that I have insisted on the passion of Wordsworth's poetry. It has been admired for its wisdom, and doubtless it is wise; for its purity, and nothing can be more pure; for its truthfulness to Nature, and it is ever true to her; but if it had possessed these merits alone and unmixed with passion, it would have lacked what is essentially characteristic of it. Remove from Wordsworth's meditative poetry

the element of passion—not the passion which obscures and destroys, but that “unconsuming *fire of light*” which kindles into a more radiant distinctness all that it touches—and much of it would sink into the merely didactic, that is to say, the prosaic. Doubtless, in the large mass of Wordsworth’s meditative poetry not a few passages are to be found which scarcely claim to be poetical; but these are palpably distinct from the body of his philosophical poetry. There is no great poet without his unpoetical passages. Such passages in Wordsworth proceed from the circumstance that, though a great poet, he was not a poet only; he was a moral and political thinker also; and if a particular thought possessed in his estimate a serious ethical value, he did not reject it merely because it made little for his poetry. It was to him a link in a chain of consecutive thought, or it held a necessary, though not an exalted, place in some theme which, while not unconnected with poetic truth, had yet closer relations with the wellbeing of his country. Nor is this all: Wordsworth more strongly than almost any other poet insists upon the vital character of true poetry; but he knew also that no poetry can uniformly maintain its highest level, and that to descend to a lower is never so pardonable as when that descent is made in order to bring forgotten truths into practical application. He wrote for the weal of man; otherwise he would not have written “as *a true man* who long had served the Muse.”

The essentially poetic character which belongs to

Wordsworth's philosophical strain is by nothing more shown than by the contrast in which it stands to his exceptional passages of a merely didactic character. In them he drops nearly to the level of writers such as Cowper, who in their day did excellent service, both literary and moral, but who were not great poets. It is in reference to them only that one can accept the allegation that Wordsworth has no "style." In them the metre also becomes relaxed, or else becomes monotonous from a singular reason—viz. because the pauses are varied too frequently to produce the *massive* effects of metrical variety. The ear is no more delighted by the mere metrical contrast between line and line than the eye is charmed by the alternations of black and white squares on a chess-board. That variety which carries with it a musical significance is produced by the contrast between whole metrical periods or paragraphs, each excellent, but different one from another; the stream of harmony now winding in long smooth curves, now circling in eddies, now breaking in falls, but every portion wafting along it a separate song. In Wordsworth's didactic passages, and sometimes in others of a merely narrative character, the diction suffers as much as the metre, now becoming prosaic and now failing to be strong. Such passages never substitute false attraction for real merit. They at once indicate their lack of inspiration. The admission is one which truth requires; but it is also one which Wordsworth can afford. *Aliquando dormitat.* It is in the case of the greatest poets that we most

vividly feel the difference between the inspired and the uninspired portion of their work. In Wordsworth we recognise the higher inspiration, no less in his philosophical than in his most familiar verse. It is marked by everything; by the more condensed and weightier diction, never artificial, never pretentious, but simple, expressive, and majestic; by the metre, no longer vague or purposeless, but advancing with "the certain step of man," or the musing step of the great thinker; and by that closer interpenetration of thought, of emotion, and of imagination, which means passion.

There are very various forms of poetic passion, and its least obvious are sometimes its noblest. Of this we find examples in such poems as "The Happy Warrior," and "Lines left on a seat in a Yew Tree." That *personal* passion does not characterise these poems is true; but that they rest upon an under-swelling intellectual and imaginative passion, and thence derive their power of exciting the reader's emotion, will become apparent at once to every one who compares them with those "moralising" passages of inferior poets, which rather record convictions long since attained, than embody thoughts quickened during the ardour of composition. In this sense the "Ode to Duty" is impassioned, and no less the "Ode against Jacobinism," for such it might well be entitled, which begins—

Who rises on the banks of Seine?

These poems are doubtless chiefly characterised by

their wisdom ; but they will seem unimpassioned only to those for whom passion is a feeble thing with a small range. When Milton defines poetry as that which must be "simple, sensuous, and *impassioned*," it is probably to this intellectual passion that he refers, as contradistinguished from the self-possessed serenity with which the intellect works in prose compositions, rather than to passion as a vehement appeal to the personal sympathies. Passion in the latter sense is rarely to be found in his own poetry ; while passion in the former sense eminently characterises the greater part of *Paradise Lost*, and the nobler passages in *Paradise Regained*. His sonnet on the "Piedmontese Massacre" is the most impassioned of his minor poems, far more so than either of those two personal poems, the sonnet on his "Blindness," or that on his "Deceased Wife," yet its passion is wholly of a moral and political order. Passion of the same order constitutes the surpassing merit not only of many, but of most of Wordsworth's "Sonnets dedicated to Liberty." To have sustained such passion in its elevation through a series of more than seventy sonnets—for to *these* trumpet-peals we cannot apply his own line on Milton's—

Soul-animating strains, *alas too few*—

required a genius ardent in an extraordinary degree. In these poems its ardours derive their sustenance exclusively from the aliment of ethical contemplation. In the sonnet to Toussaint L'Ouverture, passion rises into exultation—

Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee ; air, earth, and skies :
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

In "O friend, I know not which way I must look,"
it sounds the depths of patriotic dejection—

Rapine, avarice, expense.
This is idolatry, and these we adore :
Plain living, and high thinking are no more :
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone ; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws.

The same despondent note is breathed again in the sonnet, "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour;" and in that deeply pathetic one, "When I have borne in memory what hath tamed;" while again in those two sonnets, "It is not to be thought of that the flood," and "Inland within a hollow vale I stood," the soul of the patriot-poet, after its long vigil, is again at peace—but a peace such as still makes report of the passion which has bequeathed it. We can but refer the reader to—"Is it a reed that's shaken by the wind?" "Once she did hold the gorgeous East in fee;" "Beloved vale, I said, when I shall con;" "I grieved for Bonaparte;" "There is bondage worse, far worse to bear;" "A Roman master stands on Grecian ground," and the sequel to it; "Advance, come forth from thy Tyrolean ground;" "Say, what is honour?" "The power of armies is a visible thing." All these poems belong to one single series of Wordsworth's sonnets, and each of them is weighty with

passion in its diverse moods. Let two suffice as specimens. In the first, passion is that wrath which comes from a heart that bleeds to death. It was suggested by one of Napoleon's proclamations, and is called, "Indignation of a high-minded Spaniard."

We can endure that he should waste our lands,
Despoil our temples,—and by sword and flame
Return us to the dust from which we came ;
Such food a tyrant's appetite demands :
And we can brook the thought that by his hands
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess
For his delight, a solemn wilderness,
Where all the brave lie dead. But when of bands
Which he will break for us, he dares to speak,—
Of benefits, and of a future day
When our enlightened minds shall bless his sway,
Then the strained heart of fortitude proves weak :
Our groans, our blushes, our pale cheeks declare
That he has power to inflict what we lack strength to bear.

The second sonnet is passion suppressed ; the passion of a great thought taken up in stillness into a great imagination. It is entitled, "Thought of a Briton on the subjugation of Switzerland."

Two voices are there—one is of the sea,
One of the mountains—each a mighty voice ;
In both from age to age thou did'st rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty !
There came a tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought'st against him ; but hast vainly striven ;
Thou from thine Alpine holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.
Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft :
Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left ;
For, high-soul'd maid, what sorrow would it be
That mountain floods should thunder as before,
And ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
And neither awful voice be heard by thee !

Passion must indeed burn strongly in the heart before it can fling its glow thus high into the loftier regions of the intelligence. That is the reason why such poetry seems cold to readers whose narrower sympathies can recognise passion only in its interjectional form. Its *white* heat is to them snow. Political subjects have often suggested the most impassioned poetry. Those who object to such themes, when treated by great poets, are generally at the political side opposed to that which the poet sustains.

In Wordsworth's "Miscellaneous Sonnets" passion is less vehemently expressed than in this political series; but it is absent only in a few. Not many of them are *merely* contemplative, or merely descriptive. With elements drawn from meditation or observation, they mingle another which rises from a source more vital; and this it is that brings them back unexpectedly to the memory. Wordsworth's sonnets triumphed early over that part of his theory of diction which, though sound in the main, was incomplete. They sprang from a more passionate impulse than the average of his reflective poetry, and the condensation required by their structural limits forced the passion that inspired them to mount more high.

"Why," it is asked, "if Wordsworth's poetry be impassioned, does it so generally avoid those *personal* subjects on which passionate writers chiefly enlarge?" Before this question is answered, the allegation must be reduced within the limits of accuracy. It is true that the Wordsworthian passion, when most character-

istic, deals with subjects on which other poets have written ill because they have written coldly ; but it is true also that not a few of his poems, while unquestionably *personal*, are also amongst the most deeply, though unostentatiously, passionate. One of these is called 'A Complaint'; but to whom it was addressed no record has been left.

There is a change—and I am poor ;
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow ;
And flow it did ; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count !
Bless'd was I then, all bliss above !
Now, for this consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I—shall I dare to tell ?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love—it may be deep ;
I trust it is,—and never dry ;
What matter, if the water sleep
In silence and obscurity ?
Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

This is a poem of friendship. It is sadder than a love poem, written under similar circumstances, would have been, and saddened the more by the absence of exaggeration.

The "Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle" relate to Wordsworth's sailor brother, who seems to have eminently possessed the true sailor character—one that unites a heroic simplicity with modesty, tenderness, and a refinement wholly without

conventionality. For many years the poet's soul had dwelt within a crystal sphere of imaginative thought ; but at last the sword of reality had shattered it, and it had fallen into fragments.

I was thy neighbour once, thou rugged pile !
 Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee :
 I saw thee every day ; and all the while
 Thy form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

So pure the sky, so quiet was the air !
 So like, so very like, was day to day !
 Whene'er I looked, thine image still was there ;
 It trembled, but it never passed away.

He then records the shipwreck in which his brother perished, and ends thus—

Farewell, farewell ; the heart that lives alone,
 Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind !
 Such happiness, wherever it be known,
 Is to be pitied ; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
 And frequent sights of what is to be borne !
 Such sights, or worse, as are before me here—
 Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

The pathos of this poem is far deeper because the sorrow is not that sorrow which, in its feebleness or its spleen, rejects hope.

In the year 1803, during his Scotch tour, of which so delightful a memorial survives in his sister's journal, Wordsworth visited the grave of Burns. The great poet of Scotland had been laid in that grave but seven years before : the great poet of England, then but thirty-three years of age, knew little of the fame that awaited him also, but knew well how deep was the

debt which his genius owed to the kindred genius of the earlier, but less happy bard. Almost in sight of that grave he composed two poems, and, in substance, a third. Only the first, and far the least valuable of the three, was published till forty years had gone by. All three are, as if in homage, composed in one of Burns's favourite metres. Few will read without emotion these stanzas from the second—"At the Grave of Burns, 1803."

I shiver, spirit fierce and bold,
At thought of what I now behold :
As vapours breathed from dungeons cold
Strike pleasure dead,
So sadness comes from out the mould
Where Burns is laid.

And have I then thy bones so near,
And thou forbidden to appear ?
As if it were thyself that's here,
I shrink with pain ;
And both my wishes and my fear
Alike are vain.

Fresh as the flower whose modest worth
He sang, his genius "glinted" forth,
Rose like a star that touching earth,
For so it seems,
Doth glorify its humble birth
With matchless beams.

The piercing eye, the thoughtful brow,
The struggling heart, where be they now ?—
Full soon the aspirant of the plough,
The prompt, the brave,
Slept, with the obscurest, in the low
And silent grave.

Well might I mourn that he was gone
Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
When, breaking forth as nature's own,

It showed my youth
 How verse may build a princely throne
 On humble truth.
 Alas ! where'er the current tends,
 Regret pursues, and with it blends,—
 Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends
 By Skiddaw seen,—
Neighbours we were, and loving friends
We might have been :
 True friends though diversely inclined ;
 But heart with heart and mind with mind,
 Where the main fibres are entwined
 Through nature's skill
 May even by contraries be joined
 More closely still.
 The tear will start, and let it flow ;
 Thou "poor inhabitant below,"
 At this dread moment—even so—
 Might we together
 Have sat and talked where gowans blow,
 Or on wild heather.
 What treasures would have then been placed
 Within my reach ; of knowledge graced
 By fancy what a rich repast !
 But why go on ?—
 O spare to sweep, thou mournful blast,
 His grave grass-grown.

 Sighing I turned away ; but ere
 Night fell, I heard, or seemed to hear,
 Music that sorrow comes not near,
 A ritual hymn,
 Chanted in love that casts out fear
 By Seraphim.

Wordsworth read this poem to me when it was still in manuscript. He continued : "If you peruse these stanzas, you will find that whatever power is in them proceeds largely from the circumstance that they include few epithets. Several stanzas have none, as,

for instance, the last ; for the word 'ritual' is rather a substantive than an adjective." This condensation was owing, no doubt, to "the seriousness of passion"; for in his less impassioned poetry the epithets, though always skilfully chosen, are sometimes redundant, the contemplative character of the poet's genius disposing him to regard the objects of his thought from all sides, unlike that most concise of all writers, Dante, who presents one side of them only—but the best.

But passion has its mellow as well as its sharper strain. Those who have stood in that nook of the Grasmere churchyard which is sanctified by the graves of the Wordsworth household, will perhaps remember that of Sarah Hutchinson, sister of Wordsworth's wife. The inscription on it states that she rests beside the graves of two children whom she had loved with a great love. One of these was Wordsworth's daughter Catharine, who died in 1812, when but three years old. In memory of her was written many years later the following sonnet—

Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind
 I wished to share the transport—O with whom
 But thee, long buried in the silent tomb !
 That spot which no vicissitude can find.
 Love, faithful love, recall'd thee to my mind—
 But how could I forget thee ?—Through what power,
 Even for the least division of an hour,
 Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
 To my most grievous loss ? That thought's return
 Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
 Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
 Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more ;
 That neither present time, nor years unborn,
 Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

The sonnet which begins,

Even so for me a vision sanctified,

commemorates Sarah Hutchinson ; the "vision" being the one recorded in another sonnet which had been a favourite with her. It is as follows—

Methought I saw the footsteps of a throne
Which mists and vapours from mine eyes did shroud—
Nor view of who might sit thereon allowed ;
But all the steps and ground about were strewn
With sights the ruefullest that flesh and bone
Ever put on ; a miserable crowd,
Sick, hale, old, young, who cried before that cloud,
"Thou art our King, O Death ! to thee we groan."
I seemed to mount those steps ; the vapours gave
Smooth way ; and I beheld the face of one
Sleeping alone within a mossy cave,
With her face up to heaven ; that seemed to have
Pleasing remembrance of a thought foregone ;
A lovely beauty in a summer grave.

The same blending of sweetness with solemn pathos characterises Wordsworth's last farewell to Sir Walter Scott, on his departure from Abbotsford for Naples in 1831, a farewell written on the evening of the day when to each of them the Yarrow had been "Yarrow re-visited"—and to each for the last time.

A trouble, not of clouds, or weeping rain,
Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light
Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height ;
Spirits of Power, assembled there, complain
For kindred power departing from their sight :
While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
Lift up your hearts, ye mourners ! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes ;

Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue
 Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows,
 Follow this wondrous potentate. Be true,
 Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
 Wafting your charge to soft Parthenopé !

Many more sonnets of this character might be indicated. One of these is that troubled, yet infinitely tender one, belonging to the poet's Scotch tour in 1833, and beginning—

A point of life between my parents' dust,
 And yours, my buried little ones, am I.

Another is the sonnet to the pine-tree on Monte Mario, at Rome, which Wordsworth looked on with such deep emotion from the Pincian Hill, on learning that, when condemned to the axe, it had been purchased by his friend, Sir George Beaumont, and thus preserved. Still more touching are the two sonnets addressed to the portrait of his wife painted by Miss Gillies. They were written in 1838, when he was sixty-eight years old, and may be regarded as his farewell to poetry, so little did he write afterwards. They witness that to the last his genius was not separated from the love that had inspired it. In the earlier sonnet he declared that the portrait had for him no likeness, because the face he loved had for him never lost its youth. The second is a deeper strain. The tenderest illusion, it avers, is a wrong, because the deepest love is that which has nothing to fear from truth.

Though I beheld at first with blank surprise
 This work, I now have gazed on it so long
 I see its truth with unreluctant eyes ;

O my beloved ! I have done thee wrong,
 Conscious of blessedness, but whence it sprung,
 Ever too heedless, as I now perceive :
 Morn into noon did pass, noon into eve,
 And the old day was welcome as the young,
 As welcome, and as beautiful—in sooth
 More beautiful as being a thing more holy ;
 Thanks to thy virtues, to the eternal youth
 Of all thy goodness, never melancholy ;
 To thy large heart, and humble mind, that cast
 Into one vision, future, present, past.

Such was the evening tribute offered to one whose morn he had celebrated in the lines "She was a phantom of delight," and to whose "all-golden afternoon" he had addressed that homage of a solemn experience, beginning—

O dearer far than life and light are dear !

They are not love-poems, but they express notwithstanding far more reality of emotion than is to be found in half the sonnets of Petrarch, a remark applicable no less to several love narratives in the *Excursion*, and to the profoundly touching stanzas beginning, "'Tis said that some have died for love." Still, however, the question is asked, "Why did not Wordsworth write love-poems?" The question should rather be thus put, "Why did he who wrote *such* love-poems write so few?" He has written love-poems. The first is the one that begins—

Strange fits of passion I have known.

The second is—

I travelled among unknown men,
 with its touching close, addressed to the land he had left—

Thy mornings showed, *thy nights concealed*
 The bowers where Lucy played ;
 And thine too is the last green field
 That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

The third is that description of youthful maidenhood,
 which can never be surpassed in its union of the
 beautiful and the spiritual—

Three years she grew in sun and shower.
 Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
 On earth was never sown :
 This child I to myself will take ;
 She shall be mine, and I will make
 A lady of my own.

"Myself will to my darling be
 Both law and impulse ; and with me
 The girl, in rock and plain,
 In earth and Heaven, in glade and bower,
 Shall feel an over-seeing power
 To kindle or restrain.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn,
 That, wild with glee, across the lawn
 Or up the mountain springs ;
 And hers shall be the breathing balm,
 And hers the silence and the calm,
 Of mute, insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
 To her ; for her the willow bend ;
 Nor shall she fail to see
 Even in the motions of the storm
 Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
 By silent sympathy.

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
 To her ; and she shall lean her ear
 In many a secret place
 Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
 And beauty, born of murmuring sound,
 Shall pass into her face.

“ And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell ;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.”

Thus Nature spake. The work was done—
How soon my Lucy's race was run !
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene ;
The memory of what has been
And never more will be.

The fourth is a retrospect—

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love :
A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye !
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.
She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be ;
But she is in her grave, and O
The difference to me !

The last is a dirge, which those who confound the
passionate with the exclamatory will do well to pass by,
but which to others will represent, in its stern brevity,
the tragic rising to the terrible—

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I had no human fears :
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force ;
She neither hears, nor sees,
*Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.*

That these poems are love-poems is certain : whether they were founded on reality, the poet has left unrecorded.

No one was less disposed than Wordsworth to minister to that vulgar curiosity which in these days respects no sanctuary. The egotism with which his poetry has been charged was commonly of a wholly different sort : the "Mind of Man" he speaks of as

My haunt, and the main region of my song :

in studying human nature, his own breast was the nearest mirror of humanity into which he could look ; and it is a human,¹ not an individual interest in himself that is so frankly revealed in his philosophical verse. He was confidential on subjects respecting which others have nothing to confide ; but confidences such as those in which some poets have been profuse would have been against his instincts.

It may still, however, be asked why Wordsworth left behind him so little love-poetry ; and to this question the ordinary answer would be, Because his genius was serene, not ardent. That reply is the opposite of the truth. The question was once put to him by myself, as it probably was by others ; and

¹ I am glad to find that in this remark I have been anticipated by one of our most original critics. " There are two selves in every man—the private and the universal ;—the source of personal crotchets, and the humanity that is our bond with our fellow-men and gives us our influence over them. Half Wordsworth's weakness springs from his egotistical self. . . . But all his power springs from his universal self " (*Essays, Theological and Literary*, by Richard Holt Hutton. Strahan and Co.)

a part of his reply was this : " Had I been a writer of love-poetry, it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader." To the same question he makes an additional answer in his stanzas, "The Poet and the caged Turtle Dove"—

Love, blessed love, is everywhere
The *spirit* of my song.

These two replies taken together explain the mystery. The whole of Wordsworth's nature was impassioned, body and spirit, intellect and imagination; and for that reason he could afford to spend its poetic passion upon a vast range of themes. His genius was both ardent and serene; and he preferred those themes which moved him without disquieting him. Those who knew him well are aware that far beneath the higher and serener firmament of his intelligence there was a region of storm and cloud. In a moment the clouds would disperse, and all was again a region of brightness and serenity which seemed as if nothing could ever trouble it. He would speak with passionate grief of the death of a child, as if a bereavement forty years past had befallen him the day before, detailing the minutest circumstances of the illness; and yet, if the mood of poetic inspiration chanced to be strong upon him, it might be impossible to draw his attention to a matter of the most intimate concern. Occasionally the same fervour would break out in the form of

indignation or fiery scorn.¹ These moods sometimes lasted long, and were roused by subjects which move others but for a moment. Thus, as we learn from the "Prelude," before his youthful enthusiasm for the French Revolution had suffered confutation from the event, in the early part of the war he desired confusion to the English arms and triumph to the French ; a sentiment which he afterwards repented as a disloyalty to his country. In some of these moods grief and indignation were strangely blent, it may be because, all the profounder instincts of his soul gravitating towards peace, disturbance was a thing not only painful to him, but a yoke which astonished him, and moved his resentment. Under these circumstances, it is by no means wonderful if his poetic mind preferred to spend its energies upon themes not as the superficial fancy remote from passion, but in connection with which passion did not mean disquiet, and did not bequeath distress. His range was large. Whether he descended into the depths of man's heart, or gazed around him upon the vast and ever-varying scenery of the external world, every change of which carried with it for him a separate physiognomic expression, or mounted to the heights of philosophic meditation, he moved through regions from which passion could never be absent. It was that fire in his heart which gave

¹ I have before me a letter from Miss Fenwick, a most dear friend of Wordsworth, describing him in his sixty-ninth year : "What strange workings are there in his great mind ! How fearfully strong are all his feelings and affections ! If his intellect had been less powerful they must have destroyed him long ago."

light to his eyes, and made him discern in all things that which the frigid could not see. But "the man whose eyes were open" could see it. He regarded the poet as the prophet and *seer* of nature, and deemed it to be for man's advantage that, as such, he should help men to discern a glory very near and yet sealed to the many. Men of large natures instinctively prefer to use their special faculties in the highest and rarest region of it wherein they can move, rather than in precincts more frequented.

Before leaving this subject it may be well to remark that the charge so often brought against Wordsworth is an ungrateful one. If he wrote few love-poems, properly so called, he wrote many poems which give the best praise to love by giving the most charming pictures of the lovely and the lovable. He has left us many descriptions which will prove the well-spring of much love-poetry in future times. Thus, in his "Three Cottage Girls," we have the Italian maid—

Such (but, O lavish Nature ! why
That dark, unfathomable eye,
Where lurks a spirit that replies
To stillest mood of softest skies,
Yet hints at peace to be o'erthrown,
Another's first, and then her own ?)
Such, haply, yon Italian maid,
Our Lady's laggard votaress,
Halting beneath the chestnut's shade
To accomplish there her loveliness :
Nice aid maternal fingers lend ;
A sister serves with slacker hand ;
Then, glittering like a star, she joins the festal band.

A very different picture is the next—that of

The Helvetian girl—who daily braves
 In her light skiff, the tossing waves,
 And quits the bosom of the deep
 Only to climb the rugged steep !

Her beauty dazzles the thick wood ;
 Her courage animates the flood :
 Her step the elastic green-sward meets
 Returning unreluctant sweets ;
 The mountains (as ye heard) rejoice
 Aloud, saluted by her voice !
 Blithe paragon of Alpine grace,
 Be as thou art—for through thy veins
 The blood of heroes runs its race !
 And nobly wilt thou brook the chains
 That for the virtuous Life prepares ;
 The fetters which the matron wears ;
 The patriot mother's weight of anxious cares !

If to such fair ideals of beauty, one with virtue, we
 add those of the "Highland Girl," and her English
 sister—

A being breathing thoughtful breath,
 A traveller betwixt life and death ;
 The reason firm, the temperate will
 Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill ;
 A perfect woman, nobly plann'd
 To warn, to comfort, and command,
 And yet a spirit still, and bright
 With something of an angel light ;

and close with the three enchanting English maidens
 of "The Triad," few will deny that Wordsworth did
 his duty to love-poetry. He gave the premiss, and
 trusted the human heart to draw the conclusion.

I began by the statement that Man, as acted on
 by Nature, constituted Wordsworth's twofold theme.
 In dealing with Nature, not less than in dealing with

Man, Wordsworth's higher poetry never leaves passion behind it. In truth, it could not have done so. There is no other poet who has so often asserted the dignity of generous passion, and affirmed that the true inspiration comes from the heart—

O 'tis the *heart* that magnifies this life,
Making a truth and beauty of her own.

No one has more zealously insisted that, when working in isolation, the intellect does nothing of moral worth. Especially he makes this assertion as regards poetry—

If thought and *love* desert us, from that day
Let us break off all commerce with the Muse,

and of no poetry more than that which deals with external nature, as understood—

By the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe,
In love and holy passion.

According to him, the intellect is itself eminently capable of passion, and without passion is incapable of taking in the real significance of Nature, much more of revealing it. Further, he affirms that one of the primary functions of Nature is, through her thrilling beauty and subtle power, to create or elicit that passionateness, not of the body but of the soul, without which we can never understand the grandeur of that palace which is our dwelling-place.

Wisdom and spirit of the universe !
Thou soul, that art the eternity of thought ;
And giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion ! not in vain,

By day or starlight, thus from my first dawn
 Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
 The *passions* that build up our human soul ;
 Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,—
 But with high objects, with enduring things,
 With life and nature ; purifying thus
 The elements of feeling and of thought,
 And sanctifying by such discipline
 Both pain and fear,—until we recognize
 A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.¹

According to the operation of the mind itself the influence of Nature's beauty may be that of the Venus Urania, or of her earthlier namesake. By Ruth's false lover Nature's charm had been early felt ; but it had been that of the syren—

The wind, the tempest roaring high,
 The tumult of the tropic sky
 Might well be dangerous food
 For him, a youth to whom was given
 So much of earth—so much of Heaven,
 And such impetuous blood.

Nor less to feed voluptuous thought
 The beauteous forms of nature wrought,
 Fair trees and lovely flowers ;
 The breezes their own languor lent ;
 The stars had feelings, which they sent
 Into those gorgeous bowers.

How different are the influences of Nature on man's spirit as set forth in the bulk of Wordsworth's, as compared with Byron's descriptive poetry !

In some instances those influences on the sensitive being of man are represented as exerting themselves almost without the aid of his reflective faculties. Thus in "Tintern Abbey" we read—

¹ The Prelude.

Like a roe
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led ; more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad, animal movements all gone by)
 To me was all in all. I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract,
Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours, and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite, a feeling, and a love
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, or any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye.

Far otherwise, though with not less of passion, does
 Nature affect the more contemplative part of man's
 being—

I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.¹

According to Wordsworth's doctrine, this marvelous power of Nature over man is not a power inherent in her alone, but comes also from the human mind itself. Her aspects are things half perceived by man and half created—

Or by the power of a peculiar eye
 Or by predominance of thought oppressed.

¹ The Prelude.

The Intellect, he affirms, has been wonderfully fitted to the external world, and that external world not less wonderfully to the Intellect, in such sort that the vision of beauty and glory which surrounds us is not less than a creation perpetually called into existence by their mysterious commerce. No wonder then that it exists only to the impassioned imagination, without which it could be no more to us than the lines of the prism are to the colour-blind. Nature first evokes the creative faculty, previously latent in the human mind, and then becomes subject to it. To find an example of this reciprocal action and reaction repeated till of the merely material scene beheld little remains except its essential characteristics, intensified by becoming abstracted from all accidental details, we need seek no further than Wordsworth's description of the Borrowdale yew-trees—

But worthier still of note
 Are those fraternal four of Borrowdale,
 Joined in one solemn and capacious grove ;
 Huge trunks ! and each particular trunk a growth
 Of intertwined fibres serpentine
 Upcoiling and inveterately convolved,—
 Not uninformed with phantasy, and looks
 That threaten the profane ; a pillared shade,
 Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue
 By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged
 Perennially—beneath whose sable roof
 Of boughs, as if *for festal purpose decked*
With unrejoicing berries, ghostly shapes
 May meet at noontide. Fear and trembling hope,
 Silence and foresight—Death the skeleton
 And Time the shadow,—there to celebrate,
 As in a natural temple scattered o'er
 With altars undisturbed of mossy stone,

United worship ; or in mute repose
 To lie, and listen to the mountain flood
 Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves.

To see Nature thus, it may be said, is to see the invisible. The remark would, however, apply in some measure to Art as well as to Nature. "Look at the ruins of that monastery!" I have heard an ardent lover of Gothic architecture exclaim. "Whence is its strange and satisfying harmony? Its pointed gables stand in such happy proportion to each other, the lower to the higher, and all to the tower that rises above them, that the eye unconsciously runs along them, and connects them by the lines of an invisible masonry! It is the fabric unseen that gives its grace to the fabric your eye rests upon." In thus borrowing from the unseen, as in all her strivings, Art but imitates Nature.

Wordsworth's poetry includes no other descriptive passage in which the ideal truth passes so far beyond the mere literal truth of fact. The "sable roof" of those yew-trees is not really sable; but it is so dark that to the imagination it becomes a funeral pall. The red "unrejoicing berries" do not *deck* it, and are not there for "festal purpose"; but they would be festal elsewhere, as are the berries of the Christmas hollies, though here by contrast their brightness but enhances the gloom which it cannot dissipate. No ghostly guests kneel among the mossy altar-stones or lie and listen to the far-off mountain floods; but were such dread visitants permitted to the earth they could

not choose a more fitting precinct, or be shadowed forth in outlines more spectral yet more strong. The reader, like the poet, leaves behind him the actual scene, to follow and grope after its meanings. He is like one who among the images evoked by some potent strain of music, forgets the music itself.

In dealing with Nature thus daringly Wordsworth but obeyed the instincts which had moulded his being, from its earliest development, now with delight, and now with awe. Such moods are recorded in the first book of the "Prelude." Before they had invested him with power they had visited him with fear. Here is a specimen of the darker visitation. One summer evening in boyhood he had leaped into a boat, and, with a light heart, rowed in a direct course away from the cliff, on the summit of which his eye was fixed—

When from behind that craggy steep, till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own,
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert.

Many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude,
Of blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;

But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

Yet he who felt this *panic*—a word derived, it will be remembered, from Pan, that god of lonely places, who to the Greek symbolised infinity—was a man of peculiar robustness, physical and moral! For the northern races awe was “a pleasing fear,” and the infinite ever remained a background to the ceaseless warfare between their mountainous “Frost-giants” and the Valhalla gods who reigned in the higher skies. That imaginative instinct which, when blended with immemorial traditions, produced mythologies in the olden day, produces in modern times that poetry which has most about it of deep and sincere impulse—the poetry of the Bard, not of the “man of letters.” The two passages extracted above would by themselves suffice to show that Wordsworth was a true son of the north, and that, had he lived a few thousand years earlier, he would have sung his hymns among the Scandinavian pine-woods, not under the pillars of the Parthenon.

Wordsworth's mode of dealing with Nature was special to himself. Our poetic literature abounds in natural description, which may generally, as regards the poetry of the last two centuries, be referred to two types. The first of these sets before us beautiful objects, trees, fields, or flowers, not in harmonised combination, but each by itself. A succession of images may thus be exhibited, admirable from their

resemblance to Nature, but with nothing that powerfully affects either the imagination or the sympathies, nothing that illustrates Nature in her largeness, nothing that does more than note the broideries on the hem of her garment. A nobler species of description is to be found in several poets of a later date, who possessed a wider imagination and a deeper sense of beauty, as well as a knowledge of the mode in which Nature has been treated by the great painters. Some of these poets have learned to understand Nature at least as much in the galleries as in the fields; and several have made an ample return, supplying admirable subjects for the Poussins and the Claudes of a future day. To neither of these classes is Wordsworth referable. In some few instances he depicts separate and minute objects with vividness, but this is because in those cases, as in the poem called "The Thorn," such objects, either through harmony or through contrast, sound the keynote of something more than themselves, or because, as in some of his "Poems of the Fancy," a caprice makes him for the moment throw himself upon his lower faculties. More often he presents, not, indeed, a landscape picture—very few such are to be found in his descriptive poetry—but a fragment of one, as splendid as those fragments of rainbow light snatched up by driving mist, which never make us wish for the perfect arch. But, in the main, his method is wholly different: he paints neither the detached feature nor the graduated landscape with its harmonised distances, receding each behind each.

The poetry which does these things descends from her highest dignity, and becomes the handmaid of a sister art. He paints *the scene*, and the soul of that scene. He passes by, as irrelevant, multitudes of objects with which other poets, as, for instance, Scott, would most ably, and from real love for Nature, have enriched their pages. Such objects may with a rightful appeal solicit the eye of Nature's wandering guest. But it was not as a guest but as a thoughtful inmate that Wordsworth fixed his regard on such scenes; and their brightest embellishments might to him be but accidents, and almost impertinences, if they did not help to express the meaning of each scene. He came to Nature for her oracles, not for her *obiter dicta* or her charming babblings.

Examples of this habit might be cited almost at a random reference to his works. In the well-known poem, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," the description includes but the margin of a bay and the long galaxy of daffodils that "outdid the sparkling waves in glee"; and anything more of detail would have proved fatal to that singleness of effect with which the general character of the scene is set forth. The poet saw the daffodils because he saw little else, and he saw them in such sort that both for him and for his readers thenceforth

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Again in the lines entitled, "Stepping Westward"—
Long after sunset the poet and his sister are walking

on the shore of Loch Katrine. They are "in a strange land, and far from home"—

The dewy ground was dark and cold ;
Behind, all gloomy to behold ;

but right in face is a sky whose sunset splendours seem to widen into an infinity, and the wanderers are irresistibly impelled to advance. Two women meet them, and one greets them with the friendly salutation, "What, you are stepping westward."

The voice was soft, and she who spake
Was walking by her native lake ;
The salutation had to me
The very sound of courtesy ;
Its power was felt ; and while my eye
Was fixed upon the glowing sky,
The echo of the voice enwrought
A human sweetness with the thought
Of travelling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way.

Is this a landscape? No ; it is a scene, but a scene transfigured, the soul of the scene shining through its body. There is enough dimly to suggest the features of that scene, but only to suggest them—a glory in front, a dewy gloom behind ; at one side a still and gleaming lake, and all around a measureless peace. Another poet would have told us what rocks bordered the lake, what trees overhung it, and how many mountain-ranges rose in the distance. That is, he would have painted a landscape ; but Wordsworth was contented with a single passage from Nature's *Liber Veritatis*. When he is uninspired Wordsworth is often prolix ; but in this poem, and hundreds like

it, the power lies in the brevity. Few poets know how to be brief. It is in this inspired selectness, not in an ostentatious close-packing, whether of thoughts or of images, that true conciseness consists. It gives us *multum*, not *multa*. In Wordsworth such conciseness did not come from art, it was a necessity inherent in his inspiration when that inspiration was on him in might. Such is the conciseness of the lines—

The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is *among* the lonely hills,

In Wordsworth's peculiar interpretation of Nature (a better expression than delineation) the secret of power is often to be found in a touch or two. Thus we have the sonnet composed on Westminster Bridge with its

The river glideth at its own sweet will ;

the one beginning, "Mark the concentrated hazels," with the lines—

And thou, grey stone, the pensive likeness keep
Of a dark chamber where the mighty sleep :

the nobly-written sonnet to Lady Beaumont, which ends—

And these perennial bowers and murmuring pines
*Be gracious as the music and the bloom,
And all the mighty ravishment of spring.*

The charm of language often adds wonderfully to the power of his descriptive passages, especially in some among his later sonnets, such as those in his Scotch tours of 1831 and 1833, beginning, "Say, ye

far-travelled clouds, far-seeing hills"—"Though joy attend thee, orient at the birth"—"There's not a nook within this solemn pass"—"Greta, what fearful listening!"—"Broken in fortune, but in mind entire"—"Hope smiled when your nativity was cast." The same charm greatly enhances also the descriptive passages, so finely blended with human pathos, in the beginning and at the close of "The White Doe of Rylstone." Such language is indeed "a transparent diction which holds, as in a crystal shrine, a subtle train of thought and feeling, that seems so intimately united with the peculiar words in which it is uttered as to be almost one with them."¹ Nature is never more entirely nature, in Wordsworth's poetry, than when she is associated with the humanities. It is not an accommodation of the one theme to the other. They belong to each other like two children that play on the same cottage floor. An admirable critic has remarked: "Seldom are the great landscape painters powerful in expressing human passions and affections on canvas, or even successful in the introduction of human figures into their foregrounds; whereas in the poetic paintings of Mr. Wordsworth the landscape is always subordinate to a higher interest."² For exquisite touches of Nature thus subordinated, we may refer the reader to the early poem beginning, "'Tis said that some have died for love;" to the beginning of "The Highland Girl," and to the three

¹ Sara Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1847), vol. iii. p. 181.

² *Ibid.*

famous poems on "Yarrow." In some of these poems the emotional part seems to create the meditative, and the fruition of Nature to come less through the sight than through sensation half spiritualised—a sensation which, in its exhaustion, exchanges pleasure for sadness—as, for instance, in the two poems beginning, "It is the first mild day of March," and "I heard a thousand blended notes." Of a different character are the eminently Wordsworthian lines, "Who fancied what a pretty sight," etc. In them Nature for once is regarded as an artist—and yet as a Spirit too; a "Spirit of Paradise" fashioning her wonderful works for the culture of man's best faculties and the solace of all his genial moods. This is an eminently typical poem, for it involves the Wordsworthian philosophy of Nature; but it is not an impassioned one.

There are innumerable poems in which the descriptive vein rises into intellectual and imaginative passion. Such are, among the sonnets on the Duddon, the second, "Child of the clouds, remote from every taint;" the twenty-first, "Whence that low voice? A whisper from the heart;" and the thirty-fourth, "I thought of thee, my partner and my guide." Such, again, are several passages in that grand ode, the "Pass of Kirkstone," in the "Ode composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour," and the lines in blank verse addressed "To Lycoris." Not all of Wordsworth's descriptive poems are characterised by passion. Among those eminent rather for loveliness

of thought and melody of diction may be noted the "Ode to Lycoris"—the two autumnal poems beginning "The sylvan slopes with corn-clad fields," and "Departing summer hath assumed"—the two "May Odes"—and the "Evening Voluntaries." The contrast between these two classes of descriptive poems is most instructive. But the descriptive poems, which are at once the greatest and the most characteristic of Wordsworth, are often nearly as replete with passion as the most pathetic parts of his narrative or elegiac poetry.

One more quotation: it is a passage from the *Excursion*, one full indeed of passion, but the passion of which is of a nature not illustrated elsewhere by Wordsworth. It is not human passion: it might rather be called "elemental passion," expressing, as it does, sympathies hardly less closely bound up with the elements that sweep around us in storm or calm, than they would be if the human soul were knit to the total sphere of earth by bonds as sensitive as those which attach it to its frail earthly tabernacle.

O ! what a joy it were, in vigorous health,
 To have a body (this our vital frame
 With shrinking sensibility endued,
 And all the nice regards of flesh and blood),
 And to the elements surrender it
 As if it were a spirit ! How divine
 The liberty for frail, for mortal man,
 To roam at large among unpeopled glens
 And mountainous retirements, only trod
 By devious footsteps ; regions consecrate
 To oldest time ! and, reckless of the storm
 That keeps the raven quiet in her nest,

Be as a presence or a motion—one
 Among the many there ; and, while the mists
 Flying, and rainy vapours, call out shapes
 And phantoms from the crags and solid earth
 As fast as a musician scatters sounds
 Out of an instrument ; and, while the streams
 (As at a first creation and in haste
 To exercise their untried faculties),
 Descending from the region of the clouds
 And starting from the hollows of the earth
 More multitudinous every moment, rend
 Their way before them, what a joy to roam
 An equal among mightiest energies ;
 And haply sometimes with articulate voice,
 Amid the deafening tumult, scarcely heard
 By him that utters it, exclaim aloud,
 Be this continued so from day to day,
 Nor let the dire commotion find an end,
 Ruinous though it be, from month to month.

This is a passage which proves not only that natural description may be impassioned, but that passion is compatible with the most careful composition. The lines quoted, vehemently agitated as they are, and often suspended in their course, flow forward, notwithstanding, within the limits of a single "period," and yet are as easily followed as one of those long but artistic sentences in old Hooker, or in Milton's prose works, which never fail, however voluminous their course, to disentangle their windings and carry the reader with them out into full light.

There were some important analogies between Wordsworth and Turner as regards the delineation of Nature. The painter was unlike other painters, as the poet was unlike other poets. Each was devoted to Nature with an ardently intellectual passion ; each

associated her largely with human interests ; each discarded the conventional treatment of her ; each regarded himself as invested with a mission—that of interpreting her. To each she was something more than a mere material thing : it was the mind of Nature that each illustrated rather than the mere body ; her meanings and influences, not her physical details. Each recognised in Nature a mystery, and set forth that mystery with all its infinitudes of vastness and of power. In both instances the nature delineated was in part the nature created by a sympathetic imagination ; and it is by the mind of Wordsworth and the mind of Turner, in no small degree, that the student of each stands confronted when contemplating a passage of Nature as interpreted by the one or the other. In the delineations of both, accordingly, while there is an extraordinary fidelity to Nature, there is also an absence of mere portraiture, as in the characters of Shakespeare, which are individual and actual, but generic at the same time. Masterly as is the truth with which Turner sets forth the profounder characteristics of Nature, many of them absolutely ignored till his time, it has been remarked that he seldom even aims at minute accuracy in his representation of a particular scene. If it does not please him in its details, he modifies them without hesitation and without concealment. He could not have done otherwise. A painter must cover every part of his canvas, and therefore it is only by such modification of details irrelevant or unworthy that he remains true to the ideal. The

poet who paints in words enjoys an ampler freedom ; and Wordsworth simply left out whatever would have marred the spirit of the scene, while with touches of truth and of power he intensified the rest. It is thus that Nature herself idealises, as he has pointed out in that remarkable sonnet beginning, "Hail, Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour!" As the daylight dies, "day's mutable distinctions" die with it, but only to reveal more vividly those larger features of the scene which are beyond the power alike of the hours and of the centuries—

Those mighty barriers, and the gulf between ;
The floods—the stars—a spectacle as old
As the beginning of the heavens and earth.

IV

THE WISDOM AND TRUTH OF WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

IN early ages the term "sage" was the title of the poet. Something of a prophetic office was attributed to him ; he was regarded not seldom as a revealer of mysteries, and commonly as a teacher of wisdom ; nor was it till after the national instinct had developed itself strongly that he was expected to clothe the half-forgotten legend in Epic or Tragic form. In the course of ages poetry has preferred variety to elevation. Our modern poets have applied their gifts to ends the most unlike. Thus Shelley has been called by his admirers the poet of liberty, Keats of beauty, Scott of chivalry, Byron of impassioned and eloquent energy. A poet who had written much before three out of those four writers had been heard of was little read until after they had passed away ; and it was probably well for him that early fame did not sophisticate the purity or lessen the freedom of his genius. By many thoughtful persons Wordsworth is now regarded as the greatest

modern poet ; yet if his admirers were called on to name his most characteristic merit, the answer would be very various. Some would call him the Poet of Nature, and others the Poet of the Human Ties ; but recent times have had many descriptive poets, and many poets of the affections, while yet between them and Wordsworth there is little resemblance. Nature † and the Humanities have, indeed, a very special place in Wordsworth's poetry, which, but for what it drew from those sources, could never have existed ; but he has himself told us that his paramount aim was to be a philosophic poet ; and Coleridge said of him early that if he persevered in that aim he would not only succeed, but be the greatest poet who had ever worn the crown of philosophic verse. He persevered, and he succeeded, though he did not leave behind him, except in a fragmentary form, the great Philosophical Poem of his earlier aspirations. He had found it "more animating," to use his own expression, to embody much of what had been intended for that work in the form of those numerous minor poems which he regarded as constituting a whole, but the unity of which is lost on the superficial. He sang, indeed, of Nature and of the Humanities ; but, unlike Burns, who sang them also, and whom he loved so well, he was a man of high philosophic thought and high moral purpose. Had he, like the merely didactic poets of the last century, sought his philosophy chiefly from books, he would no more have been a great philosophic poet than Young or Akenside. These ac-

complished writers produced instructive, not philosophic poetry ; and by so doing they made it, notwithstanding their merits, more difficult for men to believe in the possibility of philosophic poetry, that is, of poetry embodying the highest poetic inspiration in a form wholly genial, and as such contradistinguished from that philosophic verse which but translates prose thoughts into metrical form. Had he taken for illustration the materialistic philosophy of Hartley or Hobbes, no gifts of metre or of diction, nor even that imagination which beautifies the lowest theme, could have expiated the offence of thought without truth and of sentiment without elevation. Happily for him, the love which he bore to Nature and to Humanity had ever been, not instinctive love only, but a reverential love. These are not, indeed, the only teachers ; but they are great teachers, and they are authentic teachers ; and his ear was ever open to the lowest whispers of these Egerian counsellors. They pointed ever towards a teaching higher than their own.

The wheel had gone round, and poetry, which had been everything in turn, reappeared among the Cumberland Mountains in one of its earliest forms, that of "Divine Philosophy." I do not affirm that the whole of that philosophy which poetry can legitimately include in her wide domain was grappled with by Wordsworth's poetry ; and I gladly admit that, wholly apart from its philosophy, that poetry has other and extraordinary merits ; but it is certain that among its merits is pre-eminently that of its Wisdom and its

Truth. That Truth is sometimes Truth actual and sometimes Truth ideal, but it is always Truth ; and that Wisdom is the wisdom which stands in contrast with mere knowledge—the seasoned wisdom of a complete intellect and of a well-balanced being ; the wisdom which has no pride, no littleness, and no contentiousness, and which is derived at once from experience and from something greater, without which moral experience could never have been formed. Our present theme, then, is that special characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry which may be termed its Wisdom and Truth ; and I shall endeavour to illustrate those qualities successively in connection with (I.) the moral relations of man ; (II.) with their political relations ; (III.) with poetry, art, science, and human progress ; (IV.) with the exterior universe ; and (V.) with a few of those problems which concern the origin and end of man as a spiritual and immortal being. Wordsworth is not understood while he is classed among the pastoral or idyllic poets, even if among these the chief place be conceded to him. He is England's great philosophic, as Shakespeare is her great dramatic, and Milton her great epic, poet. In the old days of Greece, besides the inspiration of Apollo, of the Muses, and of Mercury, there was that of Pan. He represented that principle of life diffused throughout the universe. The woodland reed-pipe, besides those notes which charmed the shepherds and the nymphs, had its mystic strain.

I. To begin with the Moral Relations. The basis

of the Wordsworthian wisdom was laid in a profound moral faith—a faith that man has a higher nature as well as a lower, a *mens melior* as well as a “faculty judging according to sense.” These two sections of our twofold being are not by necessity at variance; they have much apparently in common; yet one is from above, and the other lies below, and it is for man to elect whether he will live a spiritual life or content himself with its mere animal counterpart. The following short poem strikes the keynote of that philosophy—

Yes, full surely 'twas the echo,
Solitary, clear, profound,
Answering to thee, shouting cuckoo!
Giving to thee sound for sound.

Unsolicited reply
To a babbling wanderer sent;
Like her ordinary cry,
Like—but oh how different!

Hears not also mortal life?
Hear not we, unthinking creatures,
Slaves of folly, love, or strife,
Voices of two different natures?

Have not we, too?—Yes, we have
Answers, and we know not whence;
Echoes from beyond the grave,
Recognised intelligence!

Such within ourselves we hear
Ofttimes, ours though sent from far;
Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
For of God—of God they are!

But Wordsworth's moral wisdom never hovers long in the region of allegory. It plants its feet on the

solid earth. In his magnificent "Ode to Duty" there is, united with the same elevation of thought, a far more definite and imperative tone. The strain is of a maturer order, and the wisdom which comes by experience is wedded to that of spiritual insight. It affirms that between the lower and higher sections of man's nature there commonly exists an antagonism, and that the condition of man's life is a militant condition. A few happier spirits may stand outside the battle, and, led on by an inner law of unconscious goodness, may, at least for an indefinite period, advance along a flower-strewn path of virtue: but even these are insecure; the path of virtue is, for the most part, a rough and thorny path, and the children of men can only find peace while they tread it in obedience to a Law challenging them from above. To find true freedom they must subject themselves to a noble bondage—

Stern daughter of the Voice of God!

O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod

To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

There are who ask not if thine eye

Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely

Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work, and know it not;
Long may the kindly impulse last,
But thou, if they should totter, teach them to stand fast!

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet find that other strength, according to their need.

I, loving freedom, and untried,
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust.
And oft when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task imposed, from day to day ;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.

Through no disturbance of my soul,
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control ;
But in the quietness of thought
Me this unchartered freedom tires,
I feel the weight of chance desires.
My hopes no more must change their name,
I long for a repose which ever is the same.

Stern lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace,
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds ;
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
And the most ancient heavens, through thee, are fresh
and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power !
I call thee ; I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour ;
Oh ! let my weakness have an end.
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice ;
The confidence of reason give ;
And, in the light of truth, thy bondsman let me live !

"He sang of the Commandments great and good"—thus speaks a thoughtful poet, Isaak Williams, of the Psalmist King. No uninspired poet has offered a nobler tribute than this ode to those Commandments which that Psalmist proclaimed to be "exceeding broad"; not even that Greek poet who made his Antigone reply to the tyrant: "This edict never issued forth from Jove, not yet from that sceptred Justice that holds sway among the Shades below." It is not against law but unjust law, and the law that proceeds from no authentic authority, that the spirit of Liberty exalts itself. "When Thou hast set my heart at liberty," then, and not till then, are the highways of Virtue made straight. They are then beset no longer by those innumerable alternatives which are the plague of men who mistake a febrile wilfulness for a strong will. In subjection to a righteous law is found man's only freedom from a bondage to passions and caprices. It is a common error to assume that liberty can never exist where an unlimited choice does not exist.¹ If this assumption were true there could be no freedom of will among the angels; nay, even the Infinite Goodness might then be said not to be free, since no such alternative as that between the Good and the Evil can ever affront His divine choice. The highest liberty does not essentially consist in choice between alternatives (else it would decay in proportion as virtuous habits had given to the spirit an indisputed

¹ This subject is well illustrated in a work by Donoso Cortés, *Catholicism, Liberalism, and Socialism*.

victory over the sense), but in our doing *willingly* that which we do, and not doing it either from a servile compulsion, or from a mechanical necessity. The distinction is all-important. Man must ever venerate Liberty and aspire after it; if, therefore, he mistakes its essential nature, relatively to Law, he will account every demand upon his obedience a degradation, however necessary he may acknowledge it to be in order to avoid anarchy; and, as a consequence, the ennobling principle of loyalty must be banished at once from all human relations, domestic, civil, political, and religious—a loss simply fatal to the higher virtue.

The chief excellence of this poem, in its moral bearings, consists in the absolute spontaneousness of its “good confession” that Duty is the one thing that gives dignity to life. The poet does not speak of the excesses into which human nature falls when apart from such a guide, but of “omissions”—

I deferred

The task imposed, from day to day.

It is in the “quietness of thought” that he repudiates the “unchartered freedom” which tires, and demands instead the liberating yoke of that subjection which is at once “victory and law.” He looks around him, and from every side the same lesson is borne in upon him. It is because they obey law that the flowers return in their seasons and the stars revolve in their courses; the law of Nature is to inanimate things what Duty is to man. The peasant who had only half learned his lesson in science might imagine that

the law of gravitation was but a burden that binds man to the earth. The philosopher knows that amid the boundless fields of the creation it is that which gives to everything its proper place, its motion and its rest.

Close akin to the "Ode to Duty" is the "Happy Warrior." It illustrates by an example the principle which the earlier poem affirms. It regards human life as a militant condition—

Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he
Whom every man in arms should wish to be?
—It is the generous spirit, who, when brought
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought:
Whose high endeavors are an inward light
That make the path before him ever bright;
Who, with a natural instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn;
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,
But makes his moral being his prime care;
Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
In face of these doth exercise a power
Which is our human nature's highest dower;
Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives;

—Who, if he rise to station of command,
Rises by open means; and there will stand
On honorable terms, or else retire,
And in himself possess his own desire;
Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim;
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in wait
For wealth, or honors, or for worldly state;
Whom they must follow; on whose head must fall,
Like showers of manna, if they come at all;
Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,

A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;
But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a lover ; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a man inspired ;
And through the heat of conflict keeps the law
In calmness made, *and sees what he foresaw ;*

'Tis, finally, the man who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a nation's eye,
Or left unthought of in obscurity—
Who, with a toward or untoward lot,
Prosperous or adverse, to his wish or not,
Plays, in the many games of life, that one
Where what he most doth value must be won ;
Whom neither shape of danger can dismay,
Nor thought of tender happiness betray ;
Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpassed ;
Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must go to dust without his fame,
And leave a dead, unprofitable name,
Finds comfort in himself and in his cause ;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause :
This is the happy Warrior ; this is he
Whom every man in arms should wish to be.

It is almost impossible to rate too high poetry such as this. It reminds us of Milton's assertion that the drama might serve, "besides the office of a pulpit," to breed up a commonwealth in virtue and wisdom. The Imagination is so often a corrupting influence that to change it thus into a power ministering to Virtue, by the presentation of a virtuous ideal of Humanity, without for a moment diverting it from its proper avocations, is no mean enterprise. It is in vain to

preach sound principles to those whose moral being has been undermined by an essentially false ideal of character. From a heart thus corrupted a mist ascends which colours all things, and through which the white light of reason cannot enter.

Wordsworth's ideal warrior has, despite some superficial resemblance, little in common with the *meaque me virtute involvo* of the pagan poet. His is a character founded on self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, one therefore that presupposes that "liberty of spirit" which can exist alone where, the service of self having been annulled, room is made for a larger service. Though it makes no *direct* reference to Revelation, it is founded in the main on the great Christian Tradition. The happy Warrior has a heart full of that human hope and love which belong but to the restored Humanity; and he evinces a habit of moral faith which, even if it could have existed antecedently to a Divine Revelation, could hardly have failed to accept it upon its earliest understood challenge. In many of Wordsworth's later poems the Christianity which here exists implicitly is explicitly affirmed. There is notwithstanding a significant contrast between the concluding expression—

And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause,

(although the lines need not mean more than the "Well done, good and faithful servant" of the Gospel), and the touching humility with which a poem published many years later ends—

The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive !

The same high moral wisdom characterises Wordsworth's chief poems, even when in other respects most dissimilar. None of his poems are less like each other than "Resolution and Independence" and "Laodamia." The former belongs to the earlier period of his poetry, the latter to one comparatively late. The former is to a large degree descriptive ; it is also psychological in character ; the latter treats a classic theme with a classic majesty. But in each case the strongest effect left behind on the reader results from the challenge addressed to his moral being by a wisdom which belongs, in the first of these poems, to the region of the imagination, and which in the latter is blended with a stately passion, a passion restrained. Both poems abound in vivid imagery and intense human interest ; both address themselves not merely to our understanding but yet more to our sympathies ; the lesson taught by the earlier one being that, so long as action is possible, the severest calamities should but develop our energies more and more ; while the second tells us that, when the time for action is irrevocably past, a something greater than all action remains to us in absolute submission to the Divine Will. "Resolution and Independence" is Wordsworth's most signal example of rough and massive strength steadied by the weight of a brooding mind. "Laodamia" proves that his genius might, had he pleased, have embodied itself in forms the opposite

of those which he habitually chose for them, while their spirit would still have remained the same. He gave to this poem all the satisfying perfection of shape and all the marmorean stateliness which belongs to antiquity; but he breathed into it a soul which no bard of old Greece could have imparted to it. There are two very different modes of dealing with the antique. The first is that of imitation. The second is that which, while appropriating, recreates and elevates the classical. To the second class "Laodamia" belongs. Many a recent failure proves that antique form cannot be made to coalesce with the modern spirit; but it willingly subordinates itself, at the call of a great master, to that Moral Truth which is restricted to no age, and to that Spiritual Beauty a gleam from which has fallen upon all ages of song. Protesilaus brings back with him from the abode of the Departed a loftier spirit than any pagan poet attributed to the "Strengthless Heads." He makes no lament either for the lost pride or pleasures of man's life—

Earth destroys
These raptures duly—Erebus disdains :
Calm pleasures there abide—majestic pains.

Laodamia cannot believe that the husband restored to her through the force of her intercession is indeed to tarry with her but three hours' space—

The gods to us are merciful, and they
Yet further may relent; for mightier far
Than strength of nerve or sinew, or the sway
Of magic, potent over sun and star,

Is love, though oft to agony distress'd,
And though his favorite seat be feeble woman's breast.

With Protesilaus human love remains, but its weakness belongs to it no more. He had died for his country, and all is well—

Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end ;
For this the passion to excess was driven—
That self might be annulled, her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.

He tells her

Of worlds whose course is equable and pure ;
No fears to beat away, no strife to heal ;
The past unsighed for, and the future sure :

Of all that is most beauteous, imaged there
In happier beauty ; more pellucid streams,
An ampler ether, a diviner air,
And fields invested with purpureal gleams.

It is in vain ; she cannot bring herself to consent to the Divine Will, and she dies. She has to wear out her penance time—

Apart from happy ghosts who gather flowers
Of blissful quiet 'mid unfading bowers.

It is an abject thing to say that the high spiritual reason of this poem may be philosophy or religion, but is not poetry ; such a remark doubtless applies to many a poem which boasts of a moral "tagged on" at the close, and to many a dissertation in verse, no part of which has an inspiration. It does not apply to those thoughts which are born of high imagination in union with the spiritual reason. The objector should remember that, as love-poetry, or patriotic poetry

only exists for one who can form the idea of affection or of country, so philosophical poetry seeks no response except from those who have some habitual interest in philosophic thought.

II. Let us now pass on to the second part of our theme—the Wisdom of Wordsworth's poetry when it treats of man's political relations. In his political opinions a great change took place after early youth; in his aims and aspirations, none. From first to last he was a lover of Liberty, though till taught by experience he did not know how necessary for the interests of Liberty it is to distinguish between Liberty and License. The liberty of the individual, the purity and the peace of the family, and the freedom of faith have never been more ruthlessly sacrificed, or with effects more fatal to morals as well as to happiness, than by enthusiasts whose dream was the brotherhood of man. The true meaning of Liberty has been stated in two memorable lines¹—

What, then, is Freedom? Rightly understood,
A universal license—to be good.

Wordsworth, like Coleridge and Southey in their youth, was among those who were caught by the promise of the French Revolution (to which Walter Scott is said to have owed his Tory principles)—a period of his life commemorated in his "Prelude." Before long he was undeceived by the excesses of those whose best excuse would have been that they had loved liberty "not wisely but too well." With him the delusion

¹ Sonnet by Hartley Coleridge.

could not have been permanent. For him liberty meant the greatness of man's personal being and the dignity of household life ; and for these he could have found no substitute in the triumphs of national vanity achieved by a nation which had changed itself into a conscript army, every soldier of which was a willing and a decorated slave. Wordsworth was born a patriot as well as a poet ; but his patriotism was of the solid, not the airy, order, and he cared too much for his country's honour and happiness to wish that she should make an idol of vainglory. In that magnificent series, his "Sonnets to Liberty," the highest merit consists in the power with which they bring home the great truth that Freedom and all other political wellbeing rest on the basis of the moral law. The first-written of them was the following—

I grieved for Bonaparte, with a vain
And an unthinking grief ! for who aspires
To genuine greatness but from just desires,
And knowledge such as *he* could never gain ?
'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly and meek as womanhood.
Wisdom doth live with children round her knees :
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business : these are the degrees
By which true sway doth mount ; this is the stalk
True power doth grow on ; and her rights are these.

If it is not through the soldier of fortune that Freedom is to be won, as little is secured by the happiest material conditions—

Inland, within a hollow vale, I stood ;
 And saw, while sea was calm and air was clear,
 The coast of France—the coast of France how near !
 Drawn almost into frightful neighborhood.
 I shrunk, for verily the barrier flood
 Was like a lake, or river bright and fair,
 A span of waters ; yet what power is there !
 What mightiness for evil and for good !
 Even so doth God protect us if we be
 Virtuous and wise. Winds blow, and waters roll,
 Strength to the brave, and Power, and Deity,
 Yet in themselves are nothing ! One decree
 Spake laws to *them*, and said that by the soul
 Only the nations shall be great and free.

Here is a sonnet which asserts the immovable faith with which true Freedom is ever believed in by those to whom it has come, not through novel theories or passionate outbreaks in favour of pagan revivals, but as an inheritance from a heroic past, and as the natural reward of Christian virtue, self-respect, and self-restraint—

It is not to be thought of that the flood
 Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
 Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
 Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters unwithstood"—
 Roused tho' it be full often to a mood
 Which spurns the check of salutary bands,
 That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
 Should perish, and to evil and to good
 Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
 Armory of the invincible knights of old :
 We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
 That Shakspeare spake—the faith and morals hold
 Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung
 Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

Freedom is beset, however, by other dangers besides those which proceed from exaggeration and self-con-

fidence. Hearts sapped by worldliness are as unfit for it as those of whom Coleridge sang in his *Palinode*

The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,
Slaves by their own compulsion.

In this series of sonnets not a few are protests against that exaggerated industrialism, and undue respect for money, so essentially different from the manly industry and frugality honoured in Wordsworth's poetry, and illustrated by it in a degree very rare.

When I have borne in memory what hath tamed
Great nations, how ennobling thoughts depart
When men change swords for ledgers, and desert
The student's bower for gold, some fears unnamed
I had, my country!—am I to be blamed?
But when I think of thee, and what thou art,
Verily, in the bottom of my heart,
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.
But dearly must we prize thee; we who find
In thee a bulwark of the cause of men;
And I by my affection was beguiled.
What wonder if a poet now and then,
Among the many movements of his mind,
Felt for thee as a lover or a child?

Compare this maturer estimate of Liberty with Wordsworth's youthful aspirations thus illustrated by the lines on the "French Revolution as it appeared to enthusiasts at its commencement"—

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven! O times
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
When most intent on making of herself
A prime enchantress.

The cause of this memorable change in Wordsworth's political convictions is set forth in one of his most nobly conceived and nobly written odes, though one comparatively little known. It is a denunciation of Jacobinism, and begins thus—

Who rises on the banks of Seine,
And binds her temples with the civic wreath?
What joy to read the promise of her mien!
How sweet to rest her widespread wings beneath!

The golden promise of the Revolution is first illustrated, and next the sudden change, swift as that of the open palm into the closed fist, from universal philanthropy into remorseless ambition—

Melt, Principalities, before her melt!
Her love ye hailed—her wrath have felt.
But she through many a change of form hath gone,
And stands amidst you now, an armed creature,
Whose panoply is not a thing put on,
But the live scales of a portentous nature,
That, having wrought its way from birth to birth,
Stalks round—abhorred by Heaven, a terror to the earth!

The two chief modes of Jacobin warfare, now active aggression and now passive resistance, are next emblemized—

I marked the breathings of her dragon crest;
My soul, a sorrowful interpreter,
In many a midnight vision bowed
Before the ominous aspect of her spear;
Whether the mighty beam, in scorn upheld,
Threatened her foes—or, pompously at rest,
Seemed to bisect her orbèd shield,
As stretches a blue bar of solid cloud
Across the setting sun and through the fiery west.

After a description of the woes inflicted on the world

by this Portent, the poet affirms that a nation can find security from such only when it discards that interior weakness upon which Tyranny invariably establishes its throne—

Weak spirits are there, who would ask,
Upon the pressure of a painful thing,
The lion's sinews or the eagle's wing,
Or let their wishes loose, in forest glade,
Among the lurking powers
Of herbs and lowly flowers,
Or seek, from Saints above, miraculous aid ;
That Man may be accomplished for a task
Which his own nature hath enjoined—and why ?
If, when that interference hath relieved him,
He must sink down to languish
In worse than former helplessness—and lie
Till the caves roar—and, imbecility
Again engendering anguish,
The same weak wish returns that had before deceived him.
But Thou, Supreme Disposer ! may'st not speed
The course of things, and change the creed
Which hath been held aloft before men's sight
Since the first framing of societies,
Whether, as bards have told in ancient song,
Built up by soft, seducing harmonies,
Or pressed together by the appetite
And by the power of wrong.

Wordsworth has been accused of having passed, when his youthful political aspirations were confuted by the event, into a vulgar form of conservatism. The charge derives no sanction from this ode. The reverence it expresses for just authority is founded on the same philosophy which reverences lawful Liberty, the only liberty that is permanent. The Liberty which it denounces is the Liberty founded on crude imaginations, and an entire ignorance of human

nature, not upon the conviction—a most true one—that genuine liberty is the strenuous air which the manlier virtues breathe, the necessary condition for the responsible discharge of ethical duties, and the best cure, next to religion, for social frivolity, idleness, and littleness.

The depth of Wordsworth's devotion to true liberty is shown by the large number of his best sonnets devoted to the illustration of events which record her history or vindicate her claims.¹ In them alone there are a breadth and variety of thought seldom to be found in the whole compass of a poet's works; and yet they are but a few of those in which the genius of Wordsworth offered in mature life its tribute to Liberty. To have mastered but a small part of the lessons they affirm or imply is to be raised for ever above two converse forms of error—the error which assumes that, where the social advantages secured by order exist, there political Liberty may be dispensed with; and the worse error which imagines that Liberty can dispense with judgment and virtue, or with the Spiritual

¹ A few may usefully be named here: "On the extinction of the Venetian Republic," "To Toussaint L'Ouverture," "O friend, I know not which way I must look," "Milton," "There is a bondage worse, far worse to bear," "These times touch moneyed worldlings with dismay," "England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean," "Another year; another deadly blow," "On a celebrated Event in ancient History," "To Clarkson," "To the King of Sweden," "To Hofer," "To the Men of Kent," "The Land we from our Fathers have in trust," "O'er the wide earth, on mountain and on plain," "Look now on that adventurer," "Say, what is honour?" "Is there a power," "Yet, yet Biscayans," "The power of armies is a visible thing," "O'erweening statesmen have full long relied."

Faith on which these are based, and itself continue to exist. The liberty Wordsworth sings in a strain at once impassioned and profound is a liberty which *cannot* forget its responsibilities, and *cannot* but exult yet more in its duties than in its privileges. When a nation has learned but to conceive such a liberty as this, to possess it becomes one of her duties. Till she has conceived it adequately she cannot possess it long.

The political wisdom of Wordsworth's poetry is not less strikingly shown in his "Dion." This poem may be regarded as a companion poem to "Laodamia," and, like that work, combines an antique majesty with a profound moral pathos. In a few stanzas the substance of Plutarch's narrative is told—the princely nobleness of Dion's character and of his intellect, the highest, as Plato averred, which he had conversed with in any one so young; the deliverance of his native Syracuse from tyranny; the rapture with which the delivered received him; the purity of the conqueror's ambition, which valued neither royal power nor popular applause, and sought its reward only in the happiness of a free people, and the dignity of a state built up on the sage principles of the great Platonic Ideal studied by Dion when the "lunar beam" of the great master's teaching

Fell round him in the grove of Academe.

Yet more briefly is told the strange reverse when, at one unhappy moment following the counsels of others, Dion

Had stained the robes of civil power with blood
Unjustly shed, though for the public good.

His triumph is no triumph to him, and amidst the
shouts of an applauding city the only voice which he
can hear is that of a Conscience that had slept for an
hour to forbid him rest for ever. That Conscience
takes visible shape, as the old Greek chronicler
records—

He hears an uncouth sound—
Anon his lifted eyes
Saw at a long-drawn gallery's dusky bound
A Shape of more than mortal size
And hideous aspect stalking round and round !
A woman's garb the phantom wore,
And fiercely swept the marble floor—
Like Auster whirling to and fro,
His force on Caspian foam to try,
Or Boreas when he scours the snow
That skins the plains of Thessaly,
Or when aloft on Mænalus he stops
His flight, 'mid eddying pine-tree tops !

So, but from toil less sign of profit reaping,
The sullen Spectre to her purpose bowed,
Sweeping—vehemently sweeping—
No pause admitted, no design avowed !

Ye gods ! though he, that servile instrument,
Obeys a mystical intent !
Your minister would brush away
The spots that to my soul adhere ;
But should she labor night and day,
They will not, cannot disappear :
Whence angry perturbations, and that look
Which no philosophy can brook.

The end is tragedy half lost in its own majesty—

Shudder the walls ; the marble city wept ;
And sylvan places heave a pensive sigh ;

But in calm peace the appointed Victim slept
As he had fallen in magnanimity :
Of spirit too capacious to require
That Destiny her course should change ; too just
To his own native justice to require
That wretched boon, days lengthened by mistrust.

Released from life and cares of princely state,
He left this moral grafted on his fate :
" Him only pleasure leads, and peace attends,
Him, only him, the shield of Jove defends,
Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends."

III. Let us turn to the Wordsworthian philosophy in some of its relations with Poetry, Art, and Science. Sternly as that philosophy recoils from the Epicurean, it is never weary of converse with that Loveliness which it discerns on all sides of us. We move through worlds of enchantment from childhood to age, and it is only the dulness of a sensualised nature which hides from us their glory.

Beauty—a living presence of the earth
Surpassing the most fair ideal forms
Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed
From earth's materials—waits upon my steps,
Pitches her tent before me as I move
An hourly neighbor.

To sharpen the edge of those finer imaginative sensibilities through which alone that beauty can be discerned, and to promote their enlarged development through a discipline the more benignant for being severe—this, in Wordsworth's estimate, is the true mission of Art. He denounces all Cynicism, and he inculcates no Stoicism except that which hardens us

against things unworthy, that we may have a tenderer appreciation of that beauty which, latently or visibly, abounds in all things good.

We live by admiration, hope and love,
as he affirms ; and his inference is that

Even as these are well and wisely fixed
In dignity of being we ascend.

What has been said of Virtue he affirms no less both of the Artist's and the Poet's genius—viz. that it is sapped more often by excess in attachment to things lawful than by the direct quest of the unlawful. Here, as elsewhere, there is an analogy between Nature and the Supernatural. As the early Christian anchorites sought the desert, not that they might be solitary, but that they might live more closely united with the memories of Redemption ; so Wordsworth's poetry but flies from the vulgar world, that it may bask the more in the presence of the eternal beauty of Creation. Much has to be renounced if the noblest is to be attained. The best is always within a hand's-breadth of us ; but our hand is too coarse to recognise the good even when clasped by it. There are, according to Wordsworth's teaching, two worlds the renunciation of which is as profane as Esau's selling of his birthright—viz. the golden sun-saturated world of the humanities, and the silver, moon-clad world of the spiritual imagination. Each of these worlds is infinite ; but we can make little way into the former unless we rise superior to sensual instincts ; and we cannot pass

beyond the threshold of the latter unless we turn from the pride of life. Scores of his sonnets embody this philosophy, such as "The world is too much with us ;" "Weak is the will of man, his judgment blind ;" "Grief, thou hast lost an ever-ready friend ;" "If the whole weight of what we think and feel ;" "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free." To raise a man to the level of his higher capacities through the aid of an imagination which too often surrenders itself a vassal to the senses, is, he maintains, the poet's calling—a truth illustrated in such sonnets as "A volant tribe of bards on earth are found ;" "High is our calling, friend ;" "From the dark chambers of dejection freed." There are not a few passages in Wordsworth's poetry which illustrate his philosophy in connection with the sister art of painting, such as "Praised be the Art whose subtle power could stay." He has left us another, less known and of a later date, which contrasts painting and sculpture, and points out why the former was the delight of Christian ages, while the classic time found a deeper satisfaction in sculpture. Fortitude, Self-Sacrifice, Purity, high Aspiration, and a Sympathy profound, these he regarded as the Angels of all the Arts, not less than of Poetry. Art was bound to keep a faithful vigil, and so to illustrate this world as to make it the prophecy of a higher one. It is in this sense that he demands—

Is not then the Art
Godlike, a humble branch of the divine
In visible quest of immortality,
Stretched forth with trembling hope ?

It is in this sense that he reminds a despondent Painter that his art, like the Poet's, demands a heart, though sensitive, yet "heroically fashioned"; and in this sense he tells us that while Tranquillity was "the sovereign aim" of antique Sculpture, a loftier as well as a tenderer mission had been confided to her "Rainbow Sister" since the day when

He who wore
The crown of thorns around His bleeding brow
Warmed our sad being with His glorious light.

But, much as Wordsworth honoured Art, it was yet more to Nature that he considered the allegiance of Poetry to be due. No one had a loftier ideal than he; yet no one loved more that actual world, which is

The world of all of us, that world wherein
We have our happiness, or not at all,

and the self-exiled from which he regards as "housed in a dream." No one was lifted higher by his admiration of what is high; yet no one bent with more reverence before Nature's greatness in its lowliest forms. His own song might have been described in his lines on the "Skylark." This poem, though it does not occupy in Wordsworth's poetry that rank which is held in Shelley's by his "Ode to a Skylark," may be usefully compared with the latter. The contrast illustrates the difference between the genius of the two men. Shelley's exquisite and characteristic poem was greatly admired by the older poet, though for the most part he considered that Shelley's works were too remote from the humanities. He objected,

on the same ground, to the theme of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," while he asserted notwithstanding that Coleridge's genius, aided by his unrivalled metrical faculty, ought to have rendered him the greatest poet of modern times. In poetic capability, though not in performance, he ranked him with those great ancient poets of Wisdom and Truth who prophesied to their age and were unsubdued by adversity or neglect;—the poets whom he thus addressed—

Hail, bards of mightier grasp ! On you
I chiefly call, the chosen Few,
Who cast not off the acknowledged guide,
Who faltered not, nor turned aside ;
Whose lofty genius could survive
Privation, under sorrow thrive ;
In whom the fiery Muse revered
The symbol of a snow-white beard
Bedewed with meditative tears
Dropped from the lenient cloud of years.

In Shelley's ode no stanza is more often remembered than the one which begins—

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not.

The last of these two lines is in striking oppugnancy to Wordsworth's poetry, in which there is never a repining note ; while yet there is no poet who blends so often with the present the thought of the future and the past. The poem placed first among his works strikes the keynote of them all—

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky :

So was it when my life began ;
So is it now I am a man :
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die.
The child is father of the man :
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

Two lines in his "Phantom of Delight,"

A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet,

describe the countenance of his own poetry. There exists an opposite sort of beauty, the excellence of which is that it seems to have no relations with time—such is that of a child's face in which we note but an untroubled, radiant, all-enjoying present; and such, to a large extent, is the beauty of Greek poetry, which represents the inspired childhood of man's race, the "Juventas Mundi," the Wisdom of which is instinctive or intuitive. It is the Wisdom of a world mature that is represented in Wordsworth's strain, of a world that has learned much from the things that it has suffered, but not learned to despond; the Wisdom which has a touch of age in its youthful prime, but which retains its youthfulness in age. Chaucer wrote like a youth when his head was white, and Wordsworth like a sage when he was a youth. For the former the hawthorn bloomed till November; for the latter the April groves were touched with October gold.

The dates of Wordsworth's poems illustrate this special characteristic of them. His "Tintern Abbey"

is one of his finest poems, and its mood is a retrospective mood. He recalls that time when Nature was all in all to him, and compares it with the present, when

All its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures,

though in compensation for such loss he has learned to hear at all times

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

Who would not have said, "This is a poem of advanced life?" It was written when he was twenty-eight. To a period almost as early belong a large proportion of Wordsworth's poems characterised by a pensive thoughtfulness.¹ The solemn warning with which "Lines left in a Yew-Tree" conclude might well seem to be the voice of age. It too was composed before the poet was twenty-eight. "The Brothers" ranks in the first class of Wordsworth's meditative poems. It is the most dramatic of his works—far more so than his drama, "The Borderers"—and it is from a long experience of life that one

¹ To quote them would be impossible here, but the reader may be referred to "Remembrance of Collins," æt. nineteen; "The Female Vagrant," æt. twenty-five to twenty-eight; "The Sparrow's Nest," æt. thirty-two; "Yarrow Unvisited," æt. thirty-three; "Stepping Westward," æt. thirty-three; "The Tables Turned," "Expostulation and Reply," and "Lines written in early Spring," æt. twenty-eight; "The Poet's Epitaph," "Ruth," "The Two April Mornings," "The Fountain: a Conversation," æt. twenty-eight and twenty-nine; "Michael," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," about æt. thirty.

would have supposed the poet must have derived that knowledge of character shown in the long dialogue in which Leonard at once seeks and shuns information respecting one whom he had not seen since their youth. Yet that is one of the poems which belong to his thirtieth year. The "Lines written while sailing in a Boat at Evening" and the "Remembrance of Collins" are especially marked by a pensive thoughtfulness; but they were composed, originally as a single poem, on the banks, not of the Thames, but of the Cam, at the age of nineteen. In Wordsworth's genius there was from the first a mature thoughtfulness as well as a youthful freshness of emotion. He wrote, not as a youth nor as an elder, but as a man. The seasons were blended in his verse "like two mixed wines in one cup."

"The Female Vagrant," the meditative sadness of which is so remarkable, was composed at the age of twenty-four. The most pathetic of Wordsworth's narratives, which records Margaret, the deserted wife, might well have been the work of one whose eye had long "kept watch o'er man's mortality"; yet its more important parts were composed at intervals between the poet's twenty-fifth and twenty-eighth year. "The Sparrow's Nest," a singular instance of that retrospective observation so often to be found in Wordsworth's poetry, and so seldom elsewhere—

She looked at it as if she feared it,
Still wishing, dreading to be near it,

was written at the age of thirty-one. Three poems to the Daisy belong to Wordsworth's thirty-second year;

"Yarrow Unvisited" belongs to his thirty-third year, as do also "Stepping Westward," "To a Highland Girl," and the poems written after visiting Burns's grave. To his twenty-eighth year belongs "Simon Lee" and the well-known lines—

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning ;
Alas ! the gratitude of men
Has oft'ner left me mourning.

"Michael" was written when Wordsworth was thirty years old, and "The Old Cumberland Beggar" about the same time. The great ode on the "Intimations of Immortality" was begun when he was thirty-two, and the second part added when he was thirty-four. The circumstance that Wordsworth's most *characteristic* poems were produced early has given rise to some very rash generalisations. Some critics have erroneously inferred from this fact that his later Poetry cannot include any of the greater specimens of his art. They forget that the greatest Poets have ever possessed both that which is especially characteristic of each, and also that which is held in common by all the first-class Poets. Several of Wordsworth's unquestionably characteristic poems are not great poems ; and some of his great poems are but in a lesser degree characteristic.

It is, however, only when they are taken collectively that "the meditative might" which belongs to these poems can be fitly measured and weighed. They are very diverse, while they are also in admirable harmony

with each other. Yet, large as is their scope, they represent but a single section of that manifold Wisdom which belongs to Wordsworth's poetry. They embody only the "heart-wisdom" with which common life, interpreted by the aid of sympathies as wide as humanity itself, was ever enriching him. In a special sense Memory was to him "The Mother of the Muses." All incidents connected with human affections had for him a meaning, and the present was ever interpreted by the past. "Memory," as he tells us in the poem which bears that name, has not only "a pen to register," but also a pencil, which, though it often "smooths foregone distress," yet also

Like a tool of Fancy works
Those Spectres to dilate
That startle Conscience as she lurks
Within her lonely seat.

We have so to live that that pencil's touch may never affright us—

Retirement then might hourly look
Upon a soothing scene,
Age steal to his allotted nook
Contented and serene ;

With heart as calm as lakes that sleep
In frosty moonlight glistening,
Or mountain rivers, where they creep,
Along a channel smooth and deep,
To their own far-off murmurs listening.

Such a "mountain river" was Wordsworth's song, and with it there was ever blended an echo of murmurs from afar. That particular form of Wisdom, which may be called the wisdom of experience, as distin-

guished from the abstruse or the recondite, belongs pre-eminently to that portion of Wordsworth's poetry which is also most characterised by the emotional element. In the case of other poets the works which predominantly address the intellect have too commonly the chill of age about them. In Wordsworth Wisdom was an essential part of his *genius*, and therefore carried with it that fervour which belongs to genius in its most vital period. By shallow readers that fervour is not noted, because it has no irregular movements. It is not the flickering of the furnace-flame, but the steady heat of a genial season. A great part of it is lost on the careless reader. But even when its presence is scarcely observed, its absence, could it be withdrawn, would at once drain from the poem all that we recognise as characteristic. The wisest thoughts are often far from being the most striking. The startling thought boasts its originality, and kindles in the reader a transient excitement; but it is the proportioned thought that is the wise thought; and proportion tends to diminish apparent size. A poem is wise from what it assumes as well as from what it proves; from what it suggests as well as what it expresses; from the attractions it renounces as well as from the things it attains; from the degree in which its thoughts, when least pretentious, plainly belong to the household of wisdom and confess her lineage. The wisest poems are often those which make no parade of wisdom, but which carry with them a fragrance that belongs to a climate on which she has left her searching yet healing

breath. She has passed that way, and you see the majestic footsteps she has left behind. Such are the great majority of Wordsworth's sonnets. On the surface what predominates may be imagery, narrative, or emotion, but beneath it there is ever Wisdom.

A poem may be "of reason all compact" when the reader who confounds reason with discussion exclaims, "I see no reasoning here!" Reasoning is not Reason; at best it is a transient act of Reason, not her permanent condition. Argument is the watch-dog that keeps her gate; it is not her household nor the sacred store in its charge. The allegation of a distinguished French critic that Wordsworth is not a thinker because he is a contemplatist is the assertion that a man does not think because he dwells habitually amid the most arduous heights of thought. That high region was the native land of Wordsworth's poetic genius, as a large class of his poems demonstrate; but his poetic art was commonly exercised through a different though a kindred power, by which, without compelling feebler natures to breathe "the difficult air of the iced mountain-top," he brought down the lofty to the lowly, and showed men the light divine in the face of familiar things. Had Wordsworth been the ascetic as well as the contemplatist he would never have been the poet; he might have been something higher, but the world would have lost by the change. Fortunately for poetry, he loved as much to look on field-flowers as on the stars. Whoever reads that beautiful philosophic poem, one of some half-dozen pieces especially typical

of his genius although he classed it among his "Poems of the Fancy"—"Who fancied what a pretty sight"—will discover with what an unpremeditated grace he could suggest his philosophy in connection with everyday objects. Dryden, who was more given to reasoning than to reason, has been called by Landor "the Bacon of the rhyming crew." But while we admire the skill with which dialectics are wedged into verse in his "Hind and Panther," we cannot resist the thought that the polemical discussion might have been better carried on in prose, and that poetry more truly thoughtful has often found for itself a more tractable theme. Bacon himself has left us many a passage, such as the celebrated one beginning, "It is indeed a heaven upon earth," or his triply-repeated "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus" of science, which, though not clothed in metre, leaves as far behind in poetic imagination as in sublime thought the highest flights even of the author of "Alexander's Feast." The most thoughtful poet does not labour to nail down reluctant minds upon unwelcome convictions, but makes Persuasion do a happier work. He does not demonstrate Truth denied, but indicates Truth never before suspected, in such a fashion that it can never again be ignored. His wisdom is this: that he walks through the world God has made, with open eyes, and sees in it heavenly meanings, authentic memorials of what the Divine Maker saw in it when He pronounced His work to be "very good." He may wander far afield, but wherever he strays his eye, obedient to his heart,

turns instinctively to every object which Truth has touched, and finds on it the seal of Beauty. Those who follow his eye discern in their degree what it has discerned. In all things they find Wisdom and Truth conjoined with Beauty.

That wisdom is neither the wisdom of the schools nor of the world, but of life—the life of the humanities. It is not the Wisdom of a faculty, but of a man, and its chief seat is the heart of man. It is drawn to the objects around it by sympathy even more than by intellectual appreciation. It could not see in them the truth they reveal, if it did not profoundly feel their pathos. The wise poet has open eyes ; that he sees aright is proved when that emotion felt by him is elicited in others by the truthfulness of his poetry. Before this seer ever hang two fair visions, the world of Humanity and the world of Nature ; and he interprets the material by the moral. In both those worlds he notes a common divine design, however clouded by human imperfections ; and the resemblance which both retain to their great Original makes each appear to him as in some sort a reflection of the other. In his poetry both those worlds are represented ; and in proportion as that poetry is the result of a genuine inspiration, they are in harmony with each other, and adumbrate, if they do not venture to express, an image of Him who is higher than each. The unwise poet sees in the things around him, whether natural or human, not the Truth that sustains them, but, reflected in them, his own passions, his vanities, his

prejudices, his false traditions, his fantastic aspirations—that is, his own image. Those who share his illusions find in his verse no less a mirror of themselves, and applaud their False Prophet. But, as illusions change with time, a later poet “prophesies” the “deceits” which flatter the deceptions of a later day. The permanent poets are those who have been in vital sympathy, not with the illusions or exaggerations of their day, but with the Truth of things, and who have grown wise by reverent converse with that Truth. They may have possessed little book-learning; they may never have aimed at setting forth a doctrine or enforcing a moral. But while they watched each gesture of their teacher, Nature, “as the eyes of the handmaiden watch the hand of her mistress,” they unconsciously indicated the Truth of which they were vigilantly observant. But they could only indicate it to those who, like themselves, though in a lesser degree, were capable of discerning it. Those who have learned from these Poets call them “masters,” but they had sought only to be the servants of Nature—that is, of Truth. Their power excites admiration, their pathos draws tears; but each tribute belongs not to them, but to Nature. It is their greatness, not that they have stolen from Nature, much less that they have superseded her, but that she has shared with them her heritage; not that they have substituted their petty craft for Nature, or taught the frivolous to pass her by, but that she has accepted them as her “ministers and stewards” of her gifts.

IV. Let us consider the Wisdom and the Truth of Wordsworth's poetry in its appreciation of Nature more in detail.

Our theme is not alone its wisdom, but its wisdom and truth. There is, perhaps, no poet in whose writings the relation between these two things is so strong; and it is in their joint-dealings with Nature that it becomes most apparent. That relation is one of constantly reciprocal aid; for it is an antecedent gift of wisdom which opens our eyes to the truth, that is, to the inner meaning of those things which surround us whether in the moral or the material world; while, on the other hand, it is the habitual perception of that truth which sustains wisdom, and by an insensible accretion enlarges and develops it. Modern poetry has abounded in description; but that description has often been more striking than truthful; while in other cases it has been satisfied with a prosaic accuracy, and not risen to the significance and beauty inherent in Truth. The truthfulness of Wordsworth's observation came from a faculty higher than mere observation, which ever taught him what he was to observe, and what he was to pass by as unworthy of observation. His lines—

With gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods,

are a type of his poetry, which touches all things material with a spiritual hand, knowing that within them there is a spiritual element. Sometimes the faculty which directs the observation is a meditative

imagination, as in the poem on the Butterfly and the allusion to his sister in childhood—

But she, God love her ! feared to brush
The dust from off its wings.

Sometimes it is philosophic thought, as in "We are Seven," where a child's expressions confirm the poet's conviction that Immortality is with man an innate idea. In many a later poem the same interpretation of the lower by the higher is as marked as in the sonnet on the flowers on the summit of the pillars before the cave of Staffa—

Calm as the Universe from specular towers
Of heaven contemplated by Spirits pure.

In his record of the world's early religions (*Excursion*, Book IV.) Wordsworth tells us that

The Imaginative Faculty was Lord
Of observations natural ;

and it was through the predominance of that faculty in him that observation became something hardly distinguishable from inspiration. This peculiarity of his mind was illustrated in what it sometimes hid from him as well as in what it revealed to him. In his poem known as "Tintern Abbey" the only object in the landscape, so minutely described, which he does not see is the great monastic ruin itself. When he wrote it Nature was to him "a Passion"; and his heart did not incline either to the ecclesiastical or to the ancient merely as such. In his early days one of Nature's most striking effects remained to him invisible—

Once I could hail (howe'er serene the sky)
The Moon re-entering her monthly round,
No faculty yet given me to espy
The dusky Shape within her arms imbound,
That thin memento of effulgence lost
Which some have named her predecessor's Ghost.

The experience of life taught him at last to see it and more—

Now, dazzling Stranger ! when thou meet'st my glance
Thy dark Associate ever I discern ;
Emblem of thoughts too eager to advance
While I salute my joys, thoughts sad or stern ;
Shades of past bliss, or wishes that to gain
Their fill of promised lustre wait in vain.

Far more often Wordsworth's imagination made him note what others failed to mark. In all that deeply moves him he sees at once what exists and what is to be, as in the lines to H. C. (Hartley Coleridge), at six years old. The first stanza begins with a vivid picture of childhood ; the second shows us that childhood bent down beneath the sorrowful weight of life. What the poet could not have foreseen was that in the child then addressed the childhood was still to live on under that yoke ; that in him "the fancies from afar" would never be driven away by the cares near at hand ; that gamesome words would remain the "mock apparel" of "unutterable thought" ; and that "the breezeliike motion and the self-born carol" would be but the more striking when the locks that they waved were of silver, not of gold.

But if Wordsworth's observation is ever coloured or shadowed by wisdom, that wisdom was no less

sustained by his observation. He found aid for it everywhere—now in an effect of Nature, as described in the sonnet, “One who was suffering tumult in his soul”; now in casual incident; now in the landscape’s recurrent changes. But it was yet more from what is permanent and universal in Nature that man, according to Wordsworth’s philosophy, was to build up his moral being. To assist Nature thus to become man’s teacher he believed to be the poet’s noblest task.

I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation; and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the Individual Mind
(And the progressive powers, perhaps, no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted; and how exquisitely, too
(Theme this but little heard of among men),
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish: this is our high argument.

Regarding Nature as a teacher ever pointing out to him new lessons, Wordsworth recurred again and again in memory to the scene that had touched him once, and thus by necessity idealised it. Many of his “Memorials of a Tour” are but the growth of seed sown in his mind during the day’s journey. Nor was this an accident. Human incidents alike and Nature’s changeful aspects needed time to sink into his meditative mind and blend with it. The slower the process

the more definite was the resultant shape. We learn this from himself. The best comment on his poetry is that derived from his own account of their origin and aim, as in his letter to Charles James Fox. For hints on these subjects his sister's diary is invaluable. Her moral mind was a section of his. She had not her brother's creative faculty, but she had that imaginative sympathy and moral susceptibility which constitute so large a part of female genius. She doubtless often observed for him as well as with him ; and in what she describes we have what he saw.

We must ever bear in mind Wordsworth's philosophy respecting the external world, in connection with the inner world of thought, if we would understand his poetry in its relations with Nature. The most habitual intimacy with her had in him never subdued a reverence that sometimes amounted to awe. Near him as Nature was, she also remained apart from him. She had for him something of the supernatural. He tells us that in boyhood he often clasped the trees to convince himself that they had a substantial existence external to his own mind. The closeness of our intimacy with Nature is increased through our enjoyment while inhaling her breath—not alone or chiefly the fragrance of her flowers, but her winds and rains, the smell of the leaves, the grass, and the earth itself. By a strange fortune, or misfortune, the great Poet of Nature was almost wholly without the sense of smell. This strange "pain of loss" may have had for him its compensations. What was denied to the sense in his

fruition of Nature may possibly have been added to his intellectual appreciation of her. Every one must have observed, when gliding along the water-streets of Venice, what a saliency is imparted to their beauty by their silence. The ear remaining unchallenged, the eye seems to have acquired a twofold power, and the long line of palace-fronts arrests it like a vision. That visionary power which Nature ever exercised on Wordsworth may also have been thus enhanced by privation. (Renunciation of the lower, even when involuntary, intensifies our enjoyment of the higher.) Thus much, at least, is certain: that in Wordsworth's poetry, as in none beside, the beauty of Nature becomes a moral beauty, and her power a human power. The brightness of a human face is by it descried in the grove, which, though just touched by autumn, has not yet lost hold of its summer glories; and the gaze that dwells upon it is the gaze of one who watches the physiognomic changes in a face well loved—

Departing summer hath assumed
An aspect tenderly illumed,
The gentlest look of Spring,
That calls from yonder leafy shade
Unfaded, yet prepared to fade,
A timely carolling.

In his delineations Nature ever takes her place side by side with man. Thus in "Animal Tranquillity and Decay"—

The little hedge-row birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression; every limb,

His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought. He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet : he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten.

So with "The Old Cumberland Beggar"—

The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
With careless hand his alms along the ground,
But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
Within the old man's hat.

Who but must share the aspiration—

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head !
And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the valleys ; let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows ;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
Beat his gray locks against his withered face.

As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die.

The "Solitary Reaper" is a poem which Wordsworth alone could have written, such is the sympathetic softness with which Nature and human sentiment are blended in it. To see the maiden aright you must see "the field," and see that she is the latest to remain in it, but not too wearied to be solaced by her song. That field lies embosomed among mountains, and

The vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

The poet cannot hear it without remembering how many a wanderer in solitudes deeper yet has been cheered by Nature's songsters—the traveller who

listens beneath Arabian palms to the night-bird close by; the mariner who sees his native moorlands rise around him when first greeted by the cuckoo's call

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

He thinks now that the strain relates to "old, unhappy, far-off things," clan-fights of days gone by, and now that it may lament but

Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again.

All that is certain is that this daughter of the hills bends above her sickle and sings

As if her song could have no ending.

The clan has lost its independence, but a silver thread of minstrelsy binds them still to the memory of heroic days. The poem is not an Elegy—there is more of sweetness than of sadness in the "melancholy strain"; nor a Pastoral—there is nothing in it of changeeful incident; nor a descriptive poem—we are not told whether trees diversify the field or a river engirds it. It is a poem of Nature and of man, a melody at once and a picture, a record and a reverie.

Not less characteristic are the poems on Yarrow. That legend-haunted river had, while yet unseen, been so dear to the poet that he feared to see it, lest the dream of years might be dispelled; and the charm of "Yarrow Unvisited" consists in the pretended indifference with which he evades the importunity of

his companion, who urges him to visit it. He sees it ten years later, and only as he could have seen it—

Fair scenes for childhood's opening bloom,
For sportive youth to stray in ;
For manhood to enjoy his strength ;
Old age to wear away in !
Yon cottage seems a bower of bliss,
A covert for protection
Of tender thoughts that nestle there,
The brood of chaste affection.

With the pathos of the present the tragedy of the past mingles—

Where was it that the famous Flower
Of Yarrow Vale lay bleeding ?
His bed perchance was yon smooth mound
On which the herd is feeding.

But the sorrow was transient, the sweetness perennial—

Delicious is the lay that sings
The haunts of happy lovers ;
The path that leads them to the grove,
The leafy grove that covers :
And Pity sanctifies the verse
That paints, by strength of sorrow,
That unconquerable strength of love ;
Bear witness, rueful Yarrow !

At first, when Yarrow as a reality had superseded Yarrow as a dream, the poet felt defrauded ; but by degrees dream and vision reclaim each its own *divisum imperium*—

I see—but not by sight alone,
Loved Yarrow, have I won thee !
A ray of Fancy still survives—
Her sunshine plays upon thee !

Thy ever-youthful waters keep
A course of lively pleasure ;
And gladsome notes my lips can breathe,
Accordant to the measure.

It is this blending of the inward and the outward worlds, and again the fusion of intellect with emotion, which makes the poetry of Wordsworth, while anything but sentimental, yet eminently the poetry of elevated sentiment. It is never dry thought ; it is never irrational feeling. It comes from hidden depths of the spirit, but it weds itself in delighted sympathy with the purity and splendour of the visible universe ; and its Philosophy, like the Socratic Wisdom of old, walks familiarly amid the thoroughfares and tarries at the doors of men. The genius of Wordsworth would commonly be called "subjective," yet in its habit of minute observation it deserves no less to be called objective. The union in him of those two qualities, each in its highest degree, is one of those characteristics which Wordsworth shares with Shakespeare ; while, on the other hand, his poetic method was in polar opposition to Shakespeare's, of whose dramatic instinct he was signally destitute. Each is a profound thinker and a large-hearted humanist ; and they have, therefore, far more essential resemblance to each other than Milton possesses to either. This was early indicated by Landor, who, in his dialogue between Southey and Porson, claimed for Wordsworth a breadth of human sympathies, and power of illustrating human character, not put forth in equal degree by any other poet since our great dramatist.

Shakespeare learned his insight chiefly from the stirring life of a metropolis; the philosophic bard mainly from the woods, the fields, and the cottages of humble men. In the world of convention Wordsworth had as little part as they had. To him, as to them, Nature remained the mighty Mother; and wisdom is near to those to whom Nature is dear. Such wisdom does not come to those who can only declaim about the picturesque, but to those in whom Nature has a living part, whose yearnings are those that she inspires, whose joys are those that she ministers, whose sorrows are those which she consoles, whose daily round of dutiful and neighbourly life she approves. The poet who wrote "The Churchyard among the Mountains" had considered the ways of those laborious men, as he had "considered the lilies of the field, which toil not, neither do they spin." He had marked how Nature, with her rough sweetness, had prompted their youthful vivacities; how, with "the strong hand of her purity," she had corrected their aberrations; how the wilds and the moors had fostered their industry and those hardier virtues which would have starved in luxurious climes; and how the adversities of life had generated, on the one hand, their softer charities, and, on the other, an ascetic self-sacrifice in the form of frugality. He had noted how that mighty Mother had spoken to their souls of a mightier Father in whose law there was peace, and in whose promise there was hope. He had learned that, while the rich live among their fancies, the poor live mainly

among the great verities of Nature—health with its triumphant strength, or depressing sickness—that rest is a real joy to those who have laboured all day, and the prayer for “daily bread” a real prayer for those whose daily food is uncertain. The truthfulness of his own heart made dear to him the society of those who lived among great truths; and though he disclaimed the love of “personal talk,” no one enjoyed it more when it was free from frivolity and detraction, and no one drew from it wiser lessons. He was interested by the wayfarer’s tale, and the babble of the child; and when new forms of industry had banished the spinning-wheel from the cottage floor his ear missed, as we learn from a sonnet which ranks among the tenderest of elegies, that soothing sound every tone of which was in harmony with a virtue, or with some condition of life proximate to a virtue. When the cottage dame no longer put on “fresh raiment,” spun from the “daintiest fleece,” in honour of the Easter morn; when at Christmas the village church no longer drew to its chancel the shepherd or labourer chilled by the winter snow, his verse lamented the loss of ancient pieties which long had won

Their pensive light from a departed sun;

but he still found consolation in the pure morals and in those ancient manners, their “viewless fence,” which had long lived on, protected by their rocky ramparts—

Hail, usages of pristine mould,
And ye who guard them, mountains old !

But for Wordsworth external Nature had offices yet more holy. She was not intended, he believed, to feed man's body only, but his soul also. She was an hourly ministrant of peaceful gladness to many an unconscious recipient who served God well by gratefully accepting His gifts. For him Matter was but the shadow of Spirit, and all things fair and good on earth were but types of things yet higher subsisting in the Ideas of the Divine Creator. The Psalmist had said that the ways of God are like the firmament, and His counsels like the chambers of the deep. The converse statement must, then, be equally true : the firmament and the seas must be material symbols of things spiritual and supernatural. We read that "as the mountains stand around Jerusalem," so God protects His people : if the higher is like the lower, then the lower must have been so placed, in relation with the human mind, as to elicit the idea of the higher, otherwise doubtless as inconceivable to man as to the inferior animals. That things visible actually represent things invisible is the confession of language itself ; for such words as sweetness, brightness, greatness, harmony, stability are applied to both classes alike. A materialistic philosophy affirms, indeed, that material things are the sole realities, and that the terms in which we describe them are but metaphors when applied to spiritual things ; but it is easier to make this confident assumption than to disprove the converse

assertion made by a spiritual philosophy—viz. that things spiritual are the realities, and that the material world was created after their image, as man was created after the Image of God. Our inferior faculties have an earlier development than our nobler. Our dealings with things around us precede our dealings with the things above us; but what is the inference from this? Only that the lower is first in the field, that it may minister to the higher. Language, which is largely formed from material things, enables man to make inquiry respecting spiritual things; but it could never have prompted the instinct to make such inquiry, if it were not that in the mind of man the Ideas of things spiritual are innate, or at least exist potentially. The sea, though vast, is finite; yet its vastness suffices to elicit the idea of the Infinite—not to elicit it in an animal, but in man in whose mind that idea abides; and if we stand in delight looking down through its translucent depths, this is

Because the unstained, the clear, the crystalline
Have ever in them something of benign;
Whether in gem, in water, or in sky,
A sleeping infant's brow, or wakeful eye
Of some young maiden, only not divine.¹

It is obvious that this estimate of the visible universe, if sound at all, must apply to the whole of Nature, even to her minuter details, though her significance will be best understood in proportion as the scene she offers to our regard is characteristically

¹ Wordsworth, "Sonnet by the Sea-shore, Isle of Man."

beautiful, and as the beholder's imaginative sensibility has been trained aright. If he be but a beginner he will have to spell out Nature's language letter by letter ; if he be her apt scholar he will be able to read sentences ; and his delight will not be the less because her meanings are expressed not distinctly, but vaguely. Music has a meaning, if it be true music ; and we express that meaning vaguely when we apply to it such terms as pathetic, mirthful, impassioned, warlike, or religious ; but if we are required to be definite we reply that the ideas of Beethoven or Mozart are already expressed in the language of sound ; that they cannot be *definitely* expressed in words ; but that their presence may not be doubted, since in their absence we should have but that senseless music which Coleridge compared to a schoolboy's nonsense-verses. It is thus that the Wordsworthian Philosophy regards the Beauty of Nature as a coherent whole. Every one not blind is struck by a forcible passage, here and there, in her open book ; but to one who is acquainted with her language she pours forth a continuous strain ; stanza after stanza of her Ode, her Elegy, or her Pastoral coming out upon him in exquisite succession, as he confronts her mountain ranges, or advances along the glen, or tracks the stream in its windings through woodlands, pasture, and flowery mead.

Now, among the high offices of poetry, as a "virtuous art," and consequently as a truthful art, one is this ; to bring out Nature's meanings in their fulness to those who otherwise would but have caught glimpses

of them occasionally—persons who are without that keener insight which is at once creation and perception, but who are not without a responsive sensibility. She has to teach them first Nature's characteristics ; and nothing is characteristic without being essential Truth. A skilful Dutch picture gives to a poultry-yard or the interior of a kitchen an interest which we do not find in the original. There is no object which does not admit of being idealised ; but the process of idealisation consists not in an attempt to ornament, but to represent what has significance.

Objects which we should pass without regard please us in a picture from the truth of the representation, the painter's eye having discerned that which belongs to them essentially, while an ordinary eye would have dwelt as much on the irrelevant and the accidental. It is thus that genuine art is more true, not indeed than the Nature which it imitates, but than that Nature as seen by an indiscriminating eye. The true artist idealises by a process the opposite of the false artist. The latter adds to what he copies something which he fancies to be flattering, but which is commonly incongruous and unmeaning ; the true artist takes away what is accidental, and what remains is the characteristic and the true. The bad artist thus adds detail to detail while he remains ever within the limits of the merely individual, and thus makes his portrait a caricature, even though it may be a "beautified" caricature ; whereas the true artist brings out in his portrait the great generic type of Humanity by sub-

tracting from it the accidents ever found in flesh and blood, while at the same time he emphasises what is specially characteristic in the countenance copied. In other words, he creates while he copies, by seeing the Truth and representing it stripped of disguise. Such is the poet's function in his delineations of Nature. He has to see its Truth and express it. He expresses it mainly by eliciting its Beauty; for Truth and Beauty are but different aspects of the same thing as regarded by Reason or by Imagination. The eye of a dog is more powerful than that of a man, and not a bush or brake escapes his remark or fades from his memory. But he has not the higher Reason of man; and therefore for him neither the Truth nor the Beauty of Nature exists. He sees objects, but does not see the landscape, as he hears the sounds but does not hear the music. When the poet has fulfilled his mission aright that Truth of Nature which he has elicited flashes forth into Beauty; that Beauty breaks into life; and the voice which it utters is Nature's hymn of praise to her Creator. That voice is always ascending from Nature's lips, but inaudibly to the many:—when the true poet holds up his shell that voice is heard.

It is heard by those who have a true ear. Though Nature has ever a meaning in her landscape, she is contented to adumbrate that meaning, and does not always choose to speak it plainly. It is thus that she speaks best; for which reason her most striking scenes are often not the most beautiful, nor those which we

remember best and to which we would most gladly return. She does not "cry aloud"; her voice is low and persuasive: there are other voices—those of Duty and of Faith—which address the soul with a more imperative authority, and she is often contented to sustain their loftier music with an accompaniment in undertone. If the seer is forbidden to prophesy "unless he interpret also," Nature has her interpreter in the true poet of Nature. The "Wisdom and Truth" of his poetry are ever proportioned to the degree in which it interprets Nature aright. But he, too, speaks to the few, not the many. His function is to make her meanings intelligible to the willing apprehension, not to the reluctant, the self-absorbed, or the dull. He, too, has to remember that as there are departments of thought in which, as in science, our knowledge cannot be too distinct, so there are others in which knowledge comes to us both most safely and most with power when it falls on us like mountain outlines seen through mist. There are meanings which must be felt before they are apprehended, and which are seldom felt unless a certain degree of mystery clings about them. A poet who professes to set forth Nature's meanings as plainly as if he were translating her words is apt to read his own meanings into Nature. He makes her *allegorise*; and this is not her way—even though it is true that without parables she does not open her mouth.

I have affirmed that Wordsworth is the poet of Nature in a sense special to him. The assertion

admits of many tests. Here is one of them : Let the thoughtful reader compare the really Wordsworthian descriptive poems with those two early poems, "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches," written with ability and witnessing to an ardent love of Nature, but written also before his genius had risen to the courage of its convictions, and thrown off the recollections of the eighteenth century. He will perceive little resemblance between the authentic and the unauthentic inspiration. Here is a second test: Let him compare them next with "A Night-Piece," "Water-fowl," "View from Black Comb," and "The Haunted Tree"; these are poems of a purer taste, and, as literal descriptions, they are effective. But one feels that they were poetic exercises, or records noted in a poet's diary. These, too, are not in the higher Wordsworthian spirit. Its power, its pathos, and its wisdom are not in them. They were written *sine numine*, though not without discernment, feeling, and skill. A third test may be added : Take the best descriptive passages in Thomson or Cowper, and compare them with Wordsworth. The difference is that between mere veracity and spiritual truth, or between eloquence and pure poetry. Still more striking is the contrast if we turn to such intensely Wordsworthian poems as "Influence of Natural Objects" and "Yew-Trees."

The two last poems represent a peculiar variety of Wordsworth's descriptive poetry, in which observation is neither detained by the beauty of the object described, nor works as a servant of memory, but

becomes mastered by the imagination, seeing Nature with an eye that more than "half creates," and adding to Nature's Truth

The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream.

Even in him, however, such description is exceptional. That nature which he loves best to describe is nature not when it reflects the rapt moods of an extraordinary mind, but Nature as she is loved by the general heart of man, as she brightens the dejected, consoles the unhappy, yields its reward to industry, gives rest to the weary—the brook that has taught the child his first lesson of hardihood ; the river on which rival oarsmen have measured their strength ; the thicket that heard the youth's first declaration of love ; the bridge "crowned with the minster towers," and on which the cripple asked for alms ; the churchyard sombre with the groves of death. The nature which has ministered to God's creatures and mirrored human life is Wordsworth's nature. And in the main it is a nature as gladsome as it is serene, though it has nooks which might well be called

Apt confessionals for one
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That Life is but a tale of morning grass
Withered at eve.

Carlyle's view of human life was a gloomy one ; to him it presented an aspect full of Fortune's irony and the implacability of Fate. It yielded, indeed, even if with seeming reluctance, a reward to persevering virtue

and a field for the labours of valiant men ; but it was filled with stains and shams, and deserved the tyrannous tread that stamped it down. Far other was the aspect which the life of man bore in Wordsworth's eyes. It had, indeed, its woes, deeper than those which the selfish and the weak cannot face ; but its sorrows were sanative, and the sword of God that pierced the heart carried with it a healing virtue, from the hour when childhood was sufficient to itself—

As a faggot sparkles on the hearth
Not less if unattended, and alone,
Than when both young and old sit gathered round,

to the years when age, full of hope because true to faith,

Rejoices secretly
In the sublime attractions of the grave.

All things, he maintained, are "full of blessings." While we are in health every breath we draw is a satisfaction ; the humblest green field is a comfort to the eye, every sound of Nature, almost, is pleasant to the ear ; man's laws may be bad, but a divine law continues to fecundate the earth with all the charities of house and home. The oppressor cannot hinder the violet from reappearing, or restrain the hawthorn from renewing its snowy bloom, or reprove hearts as spotless when they spring to meet it. A fair picture must have its shadows as well as its lights, and the unguilty sorrows of human life are but such shadows. This is the estimate of man's lot taken by one whose poetry never contented itself with being the idle pastime of

a vacant day, never shunned the painful side of things, and never railed against the appointed trials of humanity. It was because he had faced those trials that Wordsworth saw what a light of consolation mingled with them and spread beyond them. He had had personal experience of bereavement, poverty, and a disappointment perhaps the deepest which he could have known—that of his political hopes for man.

Wordsworth's genius was made strong by a moral faith, in the absence of which imaginative soarings bequeath but exhaustion and dejection. It was part of his Credo that man's race advances

With an ascent and progress in the main.

He believed that the pessimist estimate of things proceeded but from the lack of a faculty accorded to teach us truth, not fiction—the Imagination—

'Tis hers to pluck the amaranthine flower
Of Faith, and round the Sufferer's temples bind
Wreaths that endure affliction's heaviest shower,
And do not shrink from sorrow's keenest wind.

He bade the poets and the artists be sure that

A cheerful life is what the Muses love,
A soaring spirit is their prime delight,

and that he who possesses

Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse

must also

Brook no continuance of weak-mindedness.

Hope, he asserts, is "the paramount duty" which God lays on us ; He insists on it that

In all men sinful is it to be slow
To hope ;

and even in the churchyard he listens to the

Jubilate from the choirs of spring.

The cynical poet and the whining poet sing as if Nature and man's life were nothing but the blundering workmanship or bad jest of an Evil Power ; that is, they see them unwisely and report them untruly. What Wordsworth sees in them is predominantly (though he does not fail to see also "what man has made of man") the essential splendour left behind by the Face of the Creator when He looked on them and beheld "that they were very good." To see thus is to see the Truth ; and that Wordsworth thus sees and thus witnesses is the "Wisdom and the Truth" of his poetry.

V. I have reached the last of those topics which I propose to discuss.

There is one class of Wordsworth's poems in which that Wisdom which so eminently characterises them takes a higher flight than in the rest, and discourses on the origin of things in strains such as the olden time called "Orphic." To write "Orphic" odes on the marvels of Creation was among the aims of Coleridge's youthful ambition ; and his Hexameter Hymn to the Earth, as well as a fragment of a Hymn to the Sun,

survive as the memorial of that intention. What he had designed was in part accomplished by the brother-bard with whom his plans must often have been the subject of discourse. Wordsworth's "Vernal Ode" is one of his greatest poems. It is not among the works of his youth. It belongs to his forty-seventh year, and was briefly described by him as "composed to place in view the immortality of succession where immortality is denied, so far as we know, to the individual creature." Transience is the law of all things here; an eternal and still glory is that of the things above; yet earthly transience is so exquisitely modulated in the great creative scheme that it is itself ever sustaining the creature with the thought of that continuance which, in his present condition, is denied to him. The forests die, but the fresh growths of each new year spring from a soil enriched by the dead leaves of its predecessor; out of the night issues the morning; and the nations are ever renewing their youth. Such is the theme, and it is treated as it might have been in those days when the bard was still revered as a prophet and a revealer. The Ode begins with the song of an Angel suddenly descended to earth. Its first stanza celebrates his native realm, the radiant stability of which is emblemized to man by the stars when they shine forth night after night—

Fresh as if evening brought their natal hour;
Her darkness splendor gave, her silence power,
To testify of Love and Grace divine.

But neither in heaven nor on earth is more than an

emblem of stability vouchsafed to the material creation—

What if those bright fires
 Shine subject to decay,
 Sons haply of extinguished sires,
 Like them to pass away
 Like clouds before the wind !
 And though to every draught of mortal breath
 Renewed throughout the bounds of earth and ocean,
 The melancholy gates of Death
 Respond with sympathetic motion ;
 Though all that feeds on nether air,
 Howe'er magnificent or fair,
 Grows but to perish, and entrust
 Its ruins to their kindred dust ;
 Yet, by the Almighty's ever-during care,
 Her procreant vigils Nature keeps
 Amid the unfathomable deeps,
 And saves the peopled fields of earth
 From dread of emptiness or dearth.
 Thus in their stations, lifting t'ward the sky
 The foliaged head in cloud-like majesty,
 The shadow-casting race of Trees survive :
 Thus in the train of Spring arrive
 Sweet Flowers—what living eye hath viewed
 Their myriads ! endlessly renewed
 Wherever strikes the sun's glad ray ;
 Where'er the subtle waters stray ;
 Wherever sportive zephyrs bend
 Their course, or genial showers descend !
 Mortals, rejoice ! the very Angels quit
 Their mansions unsusceptible of change,
 Amid your pleasant bowers to sit
 And through your sweet vicissitudes to range.

A human being might well fear that even amid the glories of heaven the new-born Spirit might sometimes regret "vicissitudes" thus described—the changeful twilights of earth, and the flash of the earliest snowdrop ; and the last four lines quoted hint that with such a

regret even heavenly Spirits are capable of sympathising. The poet, as he listens, catches the import of the Angel's song and returns to it a musical echo—

O nursed at happy distance from the cares
Of a too anxious world, mild, pastoral Muse !
That to the sparkling crown Urania wears,
And to her sister Clio's laurel wreath,
Prefer'st a garland culled from purple heath,
Or blooming thicket moist with morning dews ;
Was such bright Spectacle vouchsafed to me ?
And was it granted to the simple ear

Of thy contented votary

Such harmony to hear ?

Him rather suits it, side by side with thee,
Wrapt in a fit of pleasing indolence,
While thy tired lute hangs on the hawthorn tree,
To lie and listen, till the o'er-drowsed sense
Sinks, hardly conscious of the influence,
To the soft murmur of the vagrant Bee.
—A slender sound ! yet hoary Time
Doth to the Soul exalt it with the chime
Of all his years ; a company
Of ages coming, ages gone ;
(Nations from before them sweeping,
Regions in destruction steeping,)
Yet every awful note in unison
With that faint utterance, which tells
Of treasure sucked from buds and bells,
For the pure keeping of those waxen cells.

The creature he sings of draws near him, and its very feebleness reminds him that the most fragile shapes are those which do battle most bravely against time—

Observe each wing—a tiny van !—
The structure of her laden thigh,
How fragile ! yet of ancestry
Mysteriously remote and high :
High as the imperial front of man,
The roseate bloom on woman's cheek ;
The soaring eagle's curvèd beak ;

The white plumes of the floating swan ;
Old as the tiger's paw, the lion's mane,
Ere shaken by that mood of stern disdain
At which the desert trembles. Humming Bee !
Thy sting was needless then, perchance unknown ;
The seeds of malice were not sown ;
All creatures met in peace, from fierceness free,
And no pride blended with their dignity.
—Tears had not broken from their source ;
Nor anguish strayed from her Tartarean den ;
The golden years maintained a course
Not undiversified, though smooth and even ;
We were not mocked with glimpse and shadow then ;
Bright Seraphs mixed familiarly with men ;
And earth and stars composed a universal heaven !

There is in this poem a profound spiritual as well as philosophical Truth. The sorrow of man's estate does not come from the transience of external things, but from a defect within himself which has "disnatured" Nature's "sweet vicissitudes." The "Passing away" is realised by Sense. If Faith were as strong as Sense the restoration would be realised as vividly as the transience, and severance would cease to be, or at least would lose its sting. It would not then be in "glimpse and shadow" that the cyclic renovations of Time would present the Image of Eternity : nor would that Image be Vision only ; it would be Fruition also. It would be with the changes of human life as it is with the changes of music, where each successive cadence dissolves too sweetly to be regretted, and dies but to prepare the way for another, sweeter still.

Another of Wordsworth's Orphic poems is the Ode too humbly entitled "Stanzas on the Power of Sound." It was intended to have had a place in that poem of

which the *Excursion* is a part, a poem of which some unpublished fragments exist, and which apparently was not intended to consist exclusively of blank verse. The Ode on the "Power of Sound" was written in 1828, when the poet had reached his fifty-eighth year. At least fifteen years previously, in the seventh Book of the *Excursion* Wordsworth had recorded the lives of two men, each of whom had been deprived of one out of those two senses, the eye and the ear, through which chiefly the human soul holds communication with the outward world. To each of these sufferers there was accorded a compensation which proved how largely man's interior powers can dispense with exterior aids. The man deaf from his youth is thus described—

He grew up
From year to year in loneliness of soul ;
And this deep mountain valley was to him
Soundless, with all its streams. The bird of dawn
Did never rouse this cottager from sleep
With startling summons ; not for his delight
The vernal cuckoo shouted ; not for him
Murmured the labouring bee. When stormy winds
Were working the broad bosom of the lake
Into a thousand thousand sparkling waves,
Rocking the trees, or driving cloud on cloud
Along the sharp edge of yon lofty crags,
The agitated scene before his eye
Was silent as a picture.¹

In another passage of the *Excursion*² those two great organs of intelligence are thus contrasted—

¹ "The Churchyard among the Mountains."

² "The Pastor."

The soul sublime and pure,
With her two faculties of eye and ear—
The one by which a creature, whom his sins
Have rendered prone, can upward look to heaven ;
The other that empowers him to perceive
The voice of Deity, on height and plain,
Whispering those truths in stillness, which the Word
To the four quarters of the winds proclaims.

Three of man's five senses are senses only, and the impressions which fall upon them terminate with them. But the senses of sight and hearing are more than mere material powers ; the impressions that reach them pass through them to the intellect, which imparts to them in turn something of its own vivific might, changing mere form and colour into beauty, and mere sound into harmony. These two senses are the gates between the worlds of matter and of mind—Sacraments of Nature, feeding without intermission man's intellect and imagination. The greater part of Wordsworth's poetry celebrates the sublime ministration of the eye. This particular Ode supplies what was wanting : it celebrates the corresponding ministration of the ear, which mediates no less between man and another mighty world assigned to him as a teacher. It is as "a spiritual functionary" that the Ear is thus addressed—

Thy functions are ethereal,
As if within thee dwelt a glancing mind,
Organ of vision ! And a Spirit aerial
Informs the cell of hearing, dark and blind ;
Intricate labyrinth, more dread for thought
To enter than oracular cave ;
Strict passage, through which sighs are brought,
And whispers, for the heart, their slave ;

And shrieks that revel in abuse
Of shivering flesh ; and warbled air,
Whose piercing sweetness can unloose
The chains of frenzy, or entice a smile
Into the ambush of despair ;
Hosannas pealing down the long-drawn aisle,
And requiems answered by the pulse that beats
Devoutly, in life's last retreats !

The second stanza—this poem consists of stanzas, each of sixteen lines—enumerates a few of the individual as distinguished from combined or harmonised sounds which challenge man's heart—

The headlong streams and fountains
Serve thee, invisible Spirit, with untired powers ;
Cheering the wakeful tent on Syrian mountains,
They lull perchance ten thousand thousand flowers.
That roar, the prowling Lion's *Here I am*,
How fearful to the desert wide !
That bleat, how tender ! of the dam
Calling a straggler to her side.
Shout, Cuckoo ! let the vernal soul
Go with thee to the frozen zone ;
Toll from thy loftiest perch, lone bell-bird, toll !
At the still hour to Mercy dear,
Mercy from her twilight throne
Listening to nun's faint sob of holy fear,
The sailor's prayer breathed from a darkening sea,
Or widow's cottage lullaby.

The next four stanzas refer to harmonised sounds in their connection with the changes and chances of human life, rural, social, political, or religious. A marvellous number of themes are here compressed into narrow space—the Sabbath bells and the marriage chime, the milkmaid's ditty, the song that brightens the blind man's gloom, the veteran's mirth, the ploughman's toil, the galley-slave's task, the pilgrim's march,

the prisoner's cell, and, lastly, the shout of a delivered people when

Inspiration

Mounts with a tune that travels like a blast
Piping through cave and battlemented tower.

In the seventh stanza the theme changes : the power of music over the soul is traced downward to a dim moral region that underlies human intelligence ; while the origin of that power is traced upward to a universal Law of Order whose throne is in heaven.

As Conscience, to the centre
Of being, smites with irresistible pain,
So shall a solemn cadence, if it enter
The mouldy vaults of the dull idiot's brain,
Transmute him to a wretch from quiet hurled—
Convulsed as by a jarring din ;
And then aghast, as at the world
Of reason partially let in
By concords winding with a sway
Terrible for sense and soul !
Or, awed he weeps, struggling to quell dismay.
Point not these mysteries to an Art
Lodged above the starry pole ;
Pure modulations flowing from the heart
Of divine Love, where Wisdom, Beauty, Truth
With Order dwell, in endless youth ?

In stanzas eight and nine the "Orphean Insight, Truth's undaunted Lover," is invoked to record the fabled triumphs of Music in early Greece, when Harmony put forth her subtler essence to kindle a sensibility which had not yet broken its primal league with Law, and when Art was "daring because souls could feel." Amphion, "that walled a city with his melody," and Arion, who "could humanise the

creatures of the sea," are appealed to; but in the middle of the tenth stanza the classic legend yields place to something more potent than the highest imaginations of antique song—the dread realities of everyday life :

The pipe of Pan, to Shepherds
 Couched in the shadow of Menalian pines,
 Was passing sweet ; the eyeballs of the leopards
 That in high triumph drew the lord of vines,
 How did they sparkle to the cymbal's clang !
 While Fauns and Satyrs beat the ground
 In cadence, and Silenus swang
 This way and that, with wild flowers crowned !
 To life, to *life* give back thine ear ;
 Ye who are longing to be rid
 Of fable, though to truth subservient, hear
 The little sprinkling of cold earth that fell
 Echoed from the coffin-lid ;
 The convict's summons in the steeple's knell,
 The vain distress-gun from a leeward shore,
 Repeated—heard, and heard no more !

In stanza eleven the poet breaks forth into the expression of an impassioned desire that as "laboured minstrelsies" are competent to combine the several tones of lute and harp in great concerted pieces for the delight of sense and imagination, so Nature were but able to combine in one, for the soul's behoof, all those separate sounds by which, whether harmonious or rude, she is able at once to pierce the heart and to heal its wound—

Ye wandering Utterances, has earth no scheme,
 No scale of moral music—to unite
 Powers that survive but in the faintest dream
 Of memory ! O that they might stoop to bear
 Chains, such precious chains of sight
 As labored minstrelsies for ages wear !
 O for a balance fit the truth to tell
 Of the Unsubstantial, pondered well !

The twelfth stanza refers to the Pythagorean philosophy, according to which the whole universe rests on a basis of numbers, mathematical relations, and harmonic tones. More than six centuries before Ptolemy, Pythagoras, in anticipation to a great extent of Copernicus, had taught that the sun, not the earth, was the centre of our system, and that the planets moved round it. He had taught also, as though anticipating the law of gravitation and "the inverse square of the distances," that the movements of all the heavenly bodies were determined by geometrical principles, and that their velocities, sizes, etc., are mutually proportioned according to a certain graduated scale exactly represented by the science of numbers. Discovering that music rested on mathematical principles, and that harmonic tones stood to each other in numerical relations, he taught that the heavenly bodies in their movements through space produce musical sounds exactly proportioned to the speed and bulk of those bodies—a conception the more natural as it was then believed that a subtle ether pervaded all space (a theory to which recent science seems disposed to return), and that its agitations were excited by moving bodies, as those of our atmosphere are by the vibrations of musical strings. Such is the "Music of the Spheres" taught later by Plato, a harmony that sustains the whole creation, but which is heard by the great Creator alone, remaining inaudible to man, both because it is perfect and because it is unceasing, yet the sudden cessation of which would notwithstanding

be man's destruction. We know that the range of sounds which the human ear can grasp are restricted to about ten octaves; and consequently that if the actual sounds all around us exceeded that narrow range by a hundred or a thousand octaves, they must, however loud, escape our consciousness not less than the Pythagorean Music of the Spheres. To such sounds the poet alludes at the close of the stanza—

By one pervading spirit
Of Tones and Numbers all things are controlled,
As sages taught, when faith was found to merit
Initiation in that mystery old.
The heavens, whose aspects make our minds as still
As they themselves appear to be,
Innumerable voices fill
With everlasting harmony;
The towering headlands, crowned with mist,
Their feet among the billows, know
That Ocean is a mighty harmonist;
Thy pinions, universal Air,
Ever waving to and fro,
Are delegates of harmony and bear
Strains that support the Seasons in their round;
Stern Winter loves a dirge-like sound.

The thirteenth stanza reverts to the aspiration of an earlier one that the sounds by which Nature is ever making her thrilling appeal to the human heart might be combined into a single "scheme of moral music." If such a palpable combination of them be impossible, a compensation has been provided. They *are* combined in the heart of the sage who meditates daily "the still, sad music of Humanity"; they are combined also in the Soul of the Race, and to it their true

meaning is revealed. They constitute the ceaseless Hymn of Creation—

Break forth into thanksgiving,
Ye banded instruments of wind and chords ;
Unite, to magnify the Ever-living,
Your inarticulate notes with the voice of words
Nor hushed be service from the lowing mead,
Nor mute the forest hum of noon :
Thou too be heard, lone eagle ! freed
From snowy peak and cloud, attune
Thy hungry barkings to the hymn
Of joy that from her utmost walls
The six days' Work, by flaming Seraphim
Transmits to Heaven ! As Deep to Deep
Shouting through one valley calls,
All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
For praise and endless gratulation, poured
Into the ear of God, their Lord !

The last stanza affirms that when we have put fables away from us there remains a Truth loftier than any philosopher of antiquity dreamed of. There was a Voice before Creation existed, one which called it into existence ; there is a Voice which shall summon the sleepers from their graves ; and there is a Voice, greater than these, which shall last for ever. As there is not only a Material Seeing, but a Spiritual Seeing also, so there is not only a Material Hearing but a Spiritual Hearing ; and as that Spiritual Seeing is to feast for ever on the Beatific Vision, so for that Spiritual Hearing there remains, in the Beatific state, a Divine Object imparting to man an eternal contentment. Through a spiritual faculty of which the Eye is the type, and no less through a spiritual faculty of which the Ear is the type, Humanity, when it has "put on

the Incorruptible," is destined to converse with God, and thus find the end for which it was created.

A Voice to Light gave Being ;
To Time, and Man, his earth-born chronicler ;
A Voice shall finish doubt and dim foreseeing,
And sweep away life's visionary stir ;
The trumpet (we, intoxicate with pride,
Arm at its blast for deadly wars)
To archangelic lips applied
The grave shall open, quench the stars.
O Silence ! are man's noisy years
No more than moments of thy life ?
Is Harmony, blest Queen of smiles and tears,
With her smooth tones and discords just
Tempered into rapturous strife,
Thy destined Bond-slave ? No ! though Earth be dust
And vanish, though the Heavens dissolve, her stay
Is in the Word that shall not pass away.

It need hardly be remarked that the term *Word* is here used in the most august of its various significations, and denotes that Eternal Wisdom, Thought, and Image of the Eternal Father, through whom He utters Himself from all eternity, and "by whom He made the worlds." That Divine Utterance is here said to "have its support in the Divine Nature," and to hang everlastingly on the Spiritual Ear of God's Intelligent and Redeemed Creation, a Revelation inexhaustible, the antetype of all the harmonies of earth, and of every pleading or commanding tone with which Nature makes appeal to the heart of man.

Such is Wordsworth's Ode "On the Power of Sound." Its depth of thought is hardly less remarkable than the finished grace of its diction, and the mingled swiftness and smoothness of that metrical

current which winds on from period to period. The theme is by necessity an arduous one, and in the hands of one not an artist as well as a poet could hardly have been rendered intelligible. Treated by a master, it needs but serious attention—an attention it has seldom received. That a poem so great in conception, and so perfect in execution, should have remained so long but scantily appreciated even by Wordsworth's admirers is a painful illustration of that narrowness which too often limits the poetic sympathies.

The Ode entitled "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of early Childhood" is doubtless the greatest of Wordsworth's poems, and has been well designated as "the high-water mark of modern poetry." Its subject, the origin and destiny of the Human Soul, is the highest with which poetry can measure itself without passing out of that region in which it finds firm footing. In imagination and depth of thought it can hardly soar higher than some passages of the two Odes already referred to, but it supplements these qualities with a richer variety, and with a stronger flux and reflux of emotion. It has been studied with more care than those others of Wordsworth's poems which most nearly approach its greatness, perhaps because it was published earlier; and therefore a few remarks on it will suffice.

While the poem is essentially a philosophical one, it keeps its philosophy largely under the surface, unlike a certain inverted sort of metaphysical poetry which seems ambitious to display its roots where its blossoms

ought to be. It is not didactic poetry. It does not begin by announcing a theme, but by a dirge over a personal loss; and by degrees only do we learn that that loss is one which falls in part on all men, and most heavily, it may be, on those who are least conscious of it—

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose;
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth.

Many passages in Wordsworth's poetry record that talismanic power, wholly unconnected with human associations, which Nature had for her chief singer in his childhood. She seemed now near him, and now remote, like a Divinity. He clung to some high rock, noting little whether the vale beneath was lovely or threatening; and the wind that whistled over the craggy ledge seemed almost as much a part of him as the hair it blew back. In Nature's most familiar objects there is to children something of a miraculous

character ; and in the childhood of nations a similar fineness of sensibility, combined with a similar ignorance of Nature's laws, peopled the streams, the boughs, and the clouds with divinities. What was the power of the commonest green field or bush over Wordsworth in his childhood we can guess, and how great the bereavement when its full force had passed away, like the gleam from a pebble when the sea-spray refreshes it no more. Wordsworth rests the theory set forth in this Ode, not on abstract grounds of reason, but on an experience specially, though not exclusively, his own. But as a text is often not the demonstration, but merely the "motto," of a doctrine thus forcibly recalled to the memory of those who believe it on independent grounds, so to the poet the loss he lamented was to him in a peculiar sense the memento of that Philosophy which was involved in all his thoughts. If its philosophy had been based on argument, not on personal recollections, the poem, in losing its passion, would have lost its authenticity ; and its author would have seemed to expound a system, not to bear a witness. It is his own faith which enkindles that of his readers ; and his own rests upon experiences gone by but precious still.

The poet has been wandering, not over lonely moors such as those amid which the old man "motionless as a cloud" taught him the lore of "Resolution and Independence," but among scenes at once the grandest and the most festal. There

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,

the echoes throng through the mountains, the birds sing, the lambs bound, the shepherd-boy carols, and

The babe leaps up on his Mother's arm.

The heavens are glad above and the earth beneath ; but to him alone a piercing sadness has come like an arrow, and while the children are pulling flowers all around him he alone stands, an excommunicate from the universal feast. It is not that he is sullen : "The fulness of your bliss I feel, I feel it all." It is not the exhaustion described in Coleridge's "Dejection"—

I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

Rather it is the converse of this state. He sees, and he feels : had there been less loveliness to see, or less sensibility with which to feel it, the immedicable wound, the irrecoverable loss, would have been less felt.

I hear, I hear, with joy I hear !
But there's a Tree, of many one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone :
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat :
Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?

Suddenly out of the gloom there arises a light. A hundred bygone musings have rushed to a single conclusion, and the problem is solved. Sharply, definitely, and with nothing of preface, the Thought which has wrought deliverance is enunciated. The loss was even greater than it seemed to be ; but in its

very greatness there lives a secret Hope. It was not the loss of that gleam which beautified this earth: it was the loss of a whole world, but of one that cannot be lost for ever. We have a higher birthplace than we know; and our sorrow is itself a prophecy that the exile shall return to his country.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar :
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home.
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing boy,
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows
 He sees it in his joy ;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the East
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended :
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

The next three stanzas illustrate that gradual decline through which the soul is beguiled into a temporary forgetfulness of its celestial origin. The Earth is not, indeed, our Mother; but she is our Nurse, and she does what she can—a cruel kindness—

To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came.

Her nursling assists her work, and buries himself daily deeper in the net of her enchantments. All the

activities of childhood war on the contemplative instinct; each new acquisition of the inferior knowledge helps him to forget the higher cravings. He observes all things in the moving pageant of life that surrounds him; he is drawn towards them, he is blended with them through sympathy and imitation: the current sweeps him from the heights. Day by day "the little actor cons another part," and each is rehearsed on the stage of the lower, half-animal life—

Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom, on thy Being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

Yet still he preserves a memory, however faint, of his first estate; and this is in part to retain it. As often as we question the world of sense we assert that our heritage is in the world of Spirit—

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise,
But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may,
 Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being
 Of the Eternal Silence ; Truths that wake,
 To perish never ;
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,
 Nor man nor boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy !
 Hence, in a season of calm weather,
 Though inland far we be,
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither ;
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

The poem next, with an admirable skill, reverts to that glorious and gladsome mountain scene described in the earlier portion of it ; but no shadow now is cast across the glory, and no bitter remembrance mingles with the gladness. That which has been taken away from man has been taken only for a time ; and compensation has been made, not only

In the primal sympathy
 Which having been, must ever be,

but yet more

In the faith that looks through death.

That which was ours by right divine must be ours again and for ever.

The close of this sublime Ode restores to the reader's mind that repose which is needful after the

soarings and the sinkings of the strain. The Elegy ends in a hymn of praise : the estrangement in reconciliation ; for Nature, besides her diviner gleams, so seldom revealed, has her human side, and that alone might well suffice for "the brief parenthesis of mortal life." Its tranquil gladness is intensified by the pathos which loss alone can confer. To those who are still inmates of "this valley of exile" it is not transport but consolation that Nature brings and should bring—

And O ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Think not of any severing of our loves !
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might ;
I only have relinquished one delight,
To live beneath your more habitual sway ;
I love the brooks which down their channels fret
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they ;
The innocent brightness of a new-born day
Is lovely yet ;
The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober coloring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality ;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live ;
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears ;
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

And thus this poem, the one among Wordsworth's works which ascends most freely above "this visible diurnal round," returns to human things—a change analogous to that which takes place in the concluding stanzas of his "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle." Both these poems overflow with vehement passion, in one case chivalrous, in the other spiritual ; both of them end in a tranquillity which retains but a ripple

of the storm beyond the harbour bar. In this Ode there are many notes of that high though unostentatious art with which the poet had sedulously perfected his natural gifts. Thus, while the theme is mainly philosophical, the first four stanzas, though they make us understand that loss which has saddened a soul once self-sufficing, are yet filled mainly with exuberant and gladdening images of "boon nature's grace"; and, in like manner, the three next stanzas, which vindicate the daring doctrine of the poem, elude, notwithstanding, the polemical. They affect not to argue; they affirm, and they persuade by setting forth, in a manner accordant with that doctrine, a view of human life illustrated by successive images which make all its seasons and stages beautiful. In the metre of this Ode there is also a singular appropriateness. Some of Wordsworth's odes are written in regular stanzas, and others in irregular paragraphs. The regular structure has often an advantage in the expression of definite thought; but the irregular yields itself more pliantly to imaginative passion. Nowhere else in Wordsworth's poetry are the metrical changes so great and so sudden as in this Ode; and their effect is enhanced by a corresponding change from long lines to short—a change which faithfully echoes corresponding changes in the sentiments of the poem. That poem is in one sense a troubled poem, while in another its yearnings are ever after rest, and remind one of the description of the ocean in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"—

I hear the mighty deep hungering for calm.

How closely the sound and sense are united will become apparent to us at once if we ask ourselves what would be the result if the most skilful writer of the "heroic couplet" were to translate this Ode into that metre. Little or nothing of it would remain. Its diction is as felicitous as its metre. Parts of it are written in that "large utterance," at once majestic and simple, which makes so much of Wordsworth's poetry, when once read, haunt the ear for ever. Parts of it are familiar even to roughness. That roughness was intentional, and was not mitigated in the later editions. It was needed. The perfection of a poem may be gravely impaired by its uniform elaborateness; as, in architecture, ornament becomes offensive if it be not relieved by contrasted masses of occasional plainness or rudeness. Without such passages the sentiment of this Ode would have lacked its passionate impulse, and its doctrine would have been frozen into a scholastic theory. In this poem many extremes are reconciled. In no other has Wordsworth's genius, contemplative at once and emotional, moved through so wide an arc.

The philosophy of this Ode is substantially the Pythagorean teaching respecting the pre-existence of the human Soul, divested of its "Transmigration" theory. Many will ask how far it was seriously believed by Wordsworth. In his later life I once heard him say that he had held it with a poetic, not a religious, faith. When he wrote the poem he might perhaps

have expressed a more ardent adhesion to it. Whether or not he held the doctrine literally, he must have maintained it substantially, so strongly did he hold that of Innate Ideas. To the old saying, "Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu," he would at any time have opposed the old rejoinder, "Nisi ipse intellectus;" for his best poetry is the assertion that we bring with us into the world all those great ideas, such as the "Beautiful," the "True," the "Infinite," the "Holy," which change the physical into a moral world, and contradistinguish man from the brutes. To the same source he referred, of course, those mathematical intuitions on which the world of science rests, and of which the late Sir William Rowan Hamilton said: "They are Ideas which seem to be so far *born* with us that the possession of them, in any conceivable degree, appears to be only the development of our original powers, the unfolding of our proper humanity."¹ He might, however, have held the doctrine of his Ode on theological as well as on philosophical grounds, so closely allied is it to an opinion entertained by some theologians—viz. that each human Soul not only sees its Judge immediately after death, but saw its Creator also, for one brief moment, at the instant of its creation. Time does not exist in the spiritual region; and the expression of the Ode, "God who is our Home," implies that a single flash from the Divine Countenance might have filled the Soul with all that haunting

¹ *Life of Sir William Rowan Hamilton*, Astronomer Royal of Ireland. By Robert Perceval Greves. Longmans.

yet undeveloped Wisdom which it could have learned during a millennium spent

In that imperial Palace whence we came.

It is, however, in the *Excursion* that one might expect chiefly to find Wordsworth's highest teaching—that poem the introductory portion of which was greeted by his greatest contemporary as

An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chanted !

Its theme was nobler than that of the ancient Orphic bards. Its aim was to celebrate the creation and the marvels, not of a material, but of a spiritual universe—

Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith ;
Of blessed consolations in distress ;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power ;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread ;
Of the Individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolable retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all,
I sing. . . . Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams, can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song.

The highest of all aids is invoked, and a mission, the loftiest at which poetry can aim, is claimed—

Descend, Prophetic Spirit ! that inspir'st
The human Soul of universal earth,

Dreaming on things to come, and dost possess
A metropolitan temple in the hearts
Of mighty Poets ; upon me bestow
A gift of genuine insight ; that my Song
With star-like virtue in its place may shine,
Shedding benignant influence. . . .

What are the tidings which a seer thus commissioned has to deliver for the behoof of his fellow-men? They are, first, that man's help does not come, as pride suggests, from himself—

And if the Mind turn inward, 'tis perplexed,
Lost in a gloom of uninspired research ;
Meantime the Heart within the heart, the seat
Where Peace and happy Consciousness should dwell,
On its own axis restlessly revolves,
Yet nowhere finds the cheering light of Truth.

Wordsworth's Transcendentalism was not of that sort which assures us that because man carries an inner dial within his conscience that dial can be read by the aid of any lantern our caprice may bring to it, and needs no light from heaven.

Secondly, his tidings are that man's help does not come, as Sense suggests, chiefly from the world around us. The visible world is indeed a marvellous thing ; but if it existed alone it would be but a fair shadow. It is great alone because it tells us of things Invisible—

I have seen
A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract
Of inland ground, applying to his ear
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ;
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul
Listened intensely ; and his countenance soon
Brightened with joy, for murmurings from within
Were heard—sonorous cadences ! whereby,

To his belief, the Monitor expressed
Mysterious union with its native Sea.
Even such a shell the Universe itself
Is to the ear of Faith ; and there are times,
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart
Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation.¹

What are those "Invisible Things" of which Faith thus makes report ? They are the things which belong to that Universe which alone is true and eternal—the Spiritual and Personal Universe of Deity—

And what are things Eternal ? Powers depart,
Possessions vanish, and opinions change,
And passions hold a fluctuating seat :
But, by the storms of circumstance unshaken,
And subject neither to eclipse nor wane,
Duty exists ;—immutably survive,
For our support, the measures and the forms
Which an abstract intelligence supplies,
Whose kingdom is where time and space are not.
Of other converse, which mind, soul, and heart
Do, with united urgency, require,
What more that may not perish ? Thou, dread Source,
Prime, self-existing Cause and End of all
That in the scale of being fill their place,
Above our human region, or below,
Set and sustained ; thou, who didst wrap the cloud
Of infancy around us, that Thyself
Therein, with our simplicity awhile
Might'st hold, on earth, communion undisturbed ;
Who, from the anarchy of dreaming sleep,
Or from its death-like void, with punctual care,
And touch as gentle as the morning light,
Restorest us daily to the powers of sense,

¹ *Excursion*, Book IV.

And Reason's steadfast rule—Thou, Thou alone
Art everlasting, and the blessed Spirits
Whom thou includest, as the sea her waves :
For adoration thou endurest ; endure
For consciousness the motions of thy Will ;
For apprehension those transcendent truths
Of the pure intellect, that stand as laws
(Submission constituting strength and power)
Even to thy Being's infinite majesty !
The Universe shall pass away—a work
Glorious, because the shadow of thy might,
A step or link for intercourse with thee.

The fourth Book of the *Excursion*—"Despondency Corrected"—from which these passages are cited, is the most magnificent uninspired poetical confession anywhere to be found of that Authentic Theism which, including as it does a loyal devotion to all the Personal Attributes of God, whose providence governs His world, by necessity finds its complement in Christianity—that Christianity so zealously asserted in Wordsworth's maturer poetry, and so obviously implied in the whole of it.

In speaking of the Truthfulness which in a manner so special, and a degree so remarkable, characterises Wordsworth's poetry, I have not found room to enlarge on one important part of that subject—viz. the mode in which that Truthfulness is guarded and enforced by the perfect grammar and logic which essentially belong to Wordsworth's style, and by its contempt for false ornament. The extraordinary incorrectness of much modern poetry, and the degree in which the true laws of composition are evaded even where they are not violated palpably, the author

remaining, as far as possible, a contented outlaw from the domain of accurate periodic construction, proceeds in the main from want of intellectual Truthfulness. An analysis of Wordsworth's style as compared with that of most modern poets would be absolutely necessary for a full illustration of that Truthfulness which belongs to his poetry ; but it would require an essay in itself. The general plainness of that style is a common complaint with those whose taste has been vitiated by the over-flavoured poetry common in recent times ; but it was often with the poet a matter of deliberate choice, as is proved by the richness and majesty of his language on suitable occasions, and by the fact that hardly any poetry abounds so largely in memorable lines. The plainness of Wordsworth's style results from the greatness of his thoughts, and his contempt for the tricks of literature.

V

HENRY TAYLOR'S POETRY

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE

PART I

THE present century has been a great age of English poetry—greater unquestionably than any which preceded it, except the Elizabethan. But there is one great difference between the Elizabethan poetry and that of the nineteenth century. Our poets of the sixteenth century in the main bore to each other a considerable resemblance,—not in detail, but in spirit. The English poetry of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, has unconsciously divided itself into different schools, as remote from each other as were those of Italian painting.

One of the most remarkable circumstances connected with Mr. Taylor's poetry is the small degree in which it can be classed with any of those schools. Like Wordsworth's poetry, it is thoughtful in an unusual degree; but its thoughtfulness is never abstract or metaphysical, still less mystical. In moral gravity it has some affinity with Southey's poetry; in

scholarly and periodic construction of sentences, with Shelley's; in precision of form and compactness of diction, with Landor's. But in the case of these poets the resemblance to Mr. Taylor is far less than the dissimilitude; while with most of the recent poets he stands in striking contrast. There exists, it is true, one characteristic in common between the authors of *Childe Harold* and of *Philip van Artevelde*: in each case there is a strongly-marked ideal of human character, with which the author is plainly in sympathy, and with which he has a singular power of making men sympathise. But in all else they are absolutely opposed to each other. Lord Byron's ideal is largely that of a man wielded by his passions, and inspired but by his wrongs; one whose strength, like that of a projectile, is not a strength inherent in him, but one to which he is subjected. The ideal exhibited in *Philip van Artevelde*, while equally of this world, is a nobler conception. It is that of one whose passions are under the control of the intellect and moral will, however little these last are themselves ruled by a divine principle. But here the analogy ends. Lord Byron constantly delineates the same ideal in his various works; a proof that, despite the great ability of his dramas, his genius was not dramatic. Mr. Taylor's ideal may be found adumbrated in *Isaac Comnenus*, his earliest drama, while it is completely delineated in *Philip van Artevelde*; but in the latter work, and still more in his two later dramas, characters cast in the most different moulds are illustrated with

almost equal power. His union of vigour with classic grace is his chief characteristic.

Mr. Taylor's poetry is pre-eminently that of action, as Lord Byron's is that of passion; or rather, it includes action as well as passion, thus corresponding with Milton's definition of tragic poetry as "high actions and high passions best describing." It is this peculiarity which has made him succeed in the drama which most of our modern poets have attempted, but almost all unsuccessfully.

Wordsworth wrote a play in his youth which he published in his old age: Coleridge wrote two; but, though they bear the impress of genius, we feel in reading them that the author was not in natural sympathy with action, and that it was to him a dramatic necessity, not a thing to be valued for its own sake. He could analyse what lay still, not exhibit the fleeting. His characters are metaphysical conceptions, worked out with a conscious exercise of the philosophic faculty, not with that spontaneous energy and instinctive felicity which belongs to the genius essentially dramatic.

We should have felt certain that Scott could have excelled in the drama had he not made the attempt and failed. He could both conceive character and compose a story; but he lacked apparently the fiery intensity of the drama, and though a true poet, he is dramatic chiefly in his novels while in his poems he tends more to the Romantic Epic. Landor has written dramas and numerous dramatic scenes. They

abound in passages of high thought and refined sentiment; and they are characterised, now by the imperious eloquence, now by the antique majesty of that great writer. Yet they are not dramatic; the plot halts, as if the author had not thought it worth his pains to elaborate it; the fact being that where a genuine sympathy with dramatic action exists, the instinct of art forces the dramatist to take pains with the plot—which a celebrated author once confessed that “he always left a good deal to Providence.”

As an exception to the undramatic character of modern English genius, the *Cenci* of Shelley may be named. An extraordinary vigour and skill are shown in the treatment of a subject so forbidding as to be unfit for our times, despite the precedents, which are but partially such, of Pagan Greece. Shelley in this work remarkably exhibits the faculty of self-control that belongs to genius. On all other occasions his imagination not merely dealt largely with metaphor and image, but lived in a world of such. He piles image upon image, and the object he describes is sometimes reflected from so many different mirrors that the dazzled reader walks in a sphere where it is hard to distinguish between substance and semblance. It was only by putting an absolute restraint upon himself that he could even hope to write a drama; and in the whole of the *Cenci* there is but one passage that can be called figurative. The imagination self-subjected to this restraint became strengthened for severer toils than usual, and moulded the work into a

fair shape, though hewn out of a dark material. But he did not succeed in similar attempts at a later time. One who had the best means of forming a correct judgment, Leigh Hunt, believed that had Shelley lived he would have made himself chiefly known as a tragic poet ; but, as a matter of fact, he wrote his *Witch of Atlas* in three days, while the labour of weeks got him through but a few scenes of his projected drama on Charles I.

Much of poetic and dramatic power has been shown by other recent writers besides those to whom we have referred ; but the result has seldom corresponded with the ability spent on them. Dean Milman, Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall, Charles Lamb, George Darley, Shiel, and others have written dramas ; but it is chiefly in connection with other tasks that they are remembered ; while many plays which have been singularly successful on the stage—those of Sir Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles—have not been those of the highest literary merits. The undramatic character of modern poetic genius is evinced by the fact that while so many plays have been written, so few finely-conceived and adequately-illustrated original characters have been added to the stores of the British drama.

Mr. Taylor has now published six dramas : *Isaac Comnenus*, *Philip van Artevelde* (in two parts), *Edwin the Fair*, *A Sicilian Summer*, and *St. Clement's Eve*. The earliest of these, though at first less successful than the works that succeeded it, gave no doubtful

promise of a brilliant dramatic career. The earlier works of men of genius, however inferior to their later, have generally contained the germ of the excellence developed by labour and time; and in this instance both the style of the work and the character of the hero were an anticipation of that maturer drama which at once established the poet's reputation. It is not a little remarkable that a public which had so long been accustomed to the vehement stimulants of Lord Byron, and the bright but superficial imagery of Moore, should have responded to so sudden a summons. Had the challenge been a less bold one, it would probably have been less successful.

The new aspirant was fortunate in his theme. It was taken from a period of history when the life of the Middle Ages was passing into that of modern political society, and when those picturesque pomps of chivalry with which Scott had made his countrymen familiar were beginning to yield before the first blasts of a storm by which the ecclesiastical as well as the political institutions of Europe were visited before long. In the fourteenth century the Flemish cities, though subject to the Earl of Flanders, enjoyed an almost republican independence with respect to their internal affairs. If offended by one of the earl's bailiffs, they rose in arms under their associated "guilds" or crafts; and could they have permanently united, it would have been nearly impossible to have reduced them again to obedience. But the interest of one city was not that of another; and in Ghent itself, as well as

the towns that sided with it—such as Damne, Ypres, Courtray, Grammont, etc.—there were generally two parties, that of the rich, whose trade required peace, and that of the poor, who regarded war as their trade. It was apparently its nearness to actual life, not the chivalrous pageantry mixed up with it, that recommended this theme to a dramatist of robust and practical genius. The war was one which “in its progress extended to the whole of Flanders, and excited a degree of interest in all the civilised countries of Europe, for which the cause must be sought in the state of European communities at the time. It was believed that entire success on the part of Ghent would bring on a general rising almost throughout Christendom of the commonalty against the feudal lords and men of substance. The incorporation of the citizens of Paris, known by the name of ‘the Army with Mallets,’ was, according to the well-known chronicler of the period, ‘all by the example of them of Ghent.’ Nicholas le Flamand deterred them from pulling down the Louvre by urging the expediency of waiting to see what success might attend the Flemish insurgents. At Rheims, Chalons-on-the-Marne, at Orleans, Beauvoisin, the like designs were entertained. ‘The rebellion of the Jacquerie,’ says Froissart, ‘was never so terrible as this was likely to have been.’ Brabant, Burgundy, and the lower part of Germany were in a dangerous condition; and in England Wat Tyler’s rebellion was contemporaneous, and not unconnected with what was going on in Flanders” (Preface).

It was the first great upheaval of the popular element in modern society. At the end of the last century the "fountains of the great deep were broken open," and the institutions which had survived many a lesser shock went down beneath the great deluge. In our own day the storm continues to rage throughout no small part of the world; nor is it likely to cease in those of our sons; but the first murmurs of the tempest went forth from among the wealthy burghers of Flanders in the fourteenth century.

The leader of the insurgent party had been Jacques van Artevelde, who was murdered in a popular tumult. Things had long gone ill: the men who had successively headed the revolt had pushed themselves into eminence by courage and military skill, but had subsequently failed from want of personal ascendancy and statesmanlike ability. With their failure the play begins. Philip van Artevelde has lived the life of a retired student; but Van den Bosch, a rough hard-headed chief of the insurgents, has shrewdness enough to know that the powers of grave reflection in which he is himself deficient are as needful for the permanent success of a leader as energy and fearlessness. He offers Philip the supreme command in the people's name, and the recluse becomes the man of action. He desires to avenge his father's death; he desires to rescue his country from tyrants whose incompetency he scorns as much as he hates their brutality; but most of all he yields to that instinct which makes ability and daring seek a sphere large enough for them.

The character of Philip constitutes the principal interest of the drama. Habitually thoughtful he is, yet never abstract; and the metaphysical speculations to which he refers at a late period of his career as having once passed across his mind were evidently but those guests of youth which abide only with the few who have a special vocation for such inquiries. Life and man had been the subject of his meditations; and living from his childhood amid the whirl of intense action, when the time came to take a part, action was as easy to him as thought unaccompanied by action to Hamlet. He is not embarrassed by scruples. He seldom shrinks from what is needful because it involves suffering and danger, whether to others or to himself. He is not selfish, or, at the earlier part of his career, strongly ambitious; but neither is he generous or self-sacrificing. He is grave-hearted. His aspirations are not after an ideal excellence; but to carry out a fixed purpose is the law of his being. He knows himself and the place that belongs to him; he has calculated his powers and ascertained their limits, and by a deliberate act resolved that he will try the venture and abide the consequence. He has had no temptation to conceal from himself any of the difficulties in his way, for his is that calm courage that sees things as they are. He has small patriotic enthusiasm, and aspires after no golden age. He looks on human society as a stormy sea of passions, that need to be ruled; but he desires that they should be ruled by a manly, at least, if not a disinterested, intelligence,

not by caprice in high place or by appetites more brutal than those restrained. Sagacious in intellect and fixed in purpose, his native dignity of character retains for him that ascendancy over his fellow-men which his daring and stern justice had early acquired. Without either breadth of sympathy or subtle refinement of thought, he carries everything before him by his strength, consistency, and efficiency. To trace the changes made in such a character, first by a successful career and then by adverse fortune, was a great dramatic problem.

It is thus that he discusses the events of the day with Father John of Heda, his counsellor and friend, and formerly his preceptor—

Artevelde. I never look'd that he should live so long.
He was a man of that unsleeping spirit
He seem'd to live by miracle : his food
Was glory, which was poison to his mind
And peril to his body. He was one
Of many thousand such that die betimes,
Whose story is a fragment, known to few.
Then comes the man who has the luck to live,
And he's a prodigy. Compute the chances,
And deem there's ne'er a one in dangerous times
Who wins the race of glory, but than he
A thousand men more gloriously endow'd
Have fallen upon the course ; a thousand others
Have had their fortunes founder'd by a chance,
Whilst lighter barks push'd past them ; to whom add
A smaller tally of the singular few
Who, gifted with predominating powers,
Bear yet a temperate will and keep the peace.
The world knows nothing of its greatest men.
Father John. Had Launoy lived, he might have pass'd
for great,
But not by conquests in the Franc of Bruges.

The sphere, the scale of circumstance, is all
 Which makes the wonder of the many. Still
 An ardent soul was Launoy's, and his deeds
 Were such as dazzled many a Flemish dame.
 There'll some bright eyes in Ghent be dimm'd for him.
Artevelde. They will be dim and then be bright again.
 All is in busy, stirring, stormy motion,
 And many a cloud drifts by and none sojourns.
 Lightly is life laid down amongst us now,
 And lightly is death mourn'd : a dusk star blinks
 As fleets the rack, but look again, and lo !
 In a wide solitude of wintry sky
 Twinkles the re-illuminated star,
 And all is out of sight that smirch'd the ray.
 We have not time to mourn.

Father John. The worse for us !
 He that lacks time to mourn lacks time to mend.
 Eternity mourns that. 'Tis an ill cure
 For life's worst ills to have no time to feel them.
 Where sorrow's held intrusive and turn'd out,
 There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
 Nor aught that dignifies humanity.
 Yet such the barrenness of busy life !
 From shelf to shelf Ambition clammers up
 To reach the naked'st pinnacle of all,
 Whilst Magnanimity, absolved from toil,
 Reposes self-included at the base.
 But this thou know'st.

Philip has won, almost without seeking them, the affections of a beautiful but unprotected young Flemish heiress, the friend of his sister, Clara van Artevelde. In an interview, in which the confiding grace, ingenuousness, and devotedness of the Lady Adriana are more striking than any chivalrous ardour on her lover's part, he gains the promise of her hand. She has had a less fortunate admirer in the Lord of Occo ; and the rejected suitor is stimulated by jealousy, as well as by his political interests, to conspire against his rival.

The Earl of Flanders has sent two emissaries, Sir Guisebert Grutt and Sir Simon Bette, to traffic with traitors in the Flemish camp. To divide his enemies, he has also offered an amnesty, on condition that three hundred citizens are delivered up to his justice. A meeting is convened at the Stadt-house ; and the Lord of Occo promises to attend it, having first resolved on the assassination of Philip. Fearing, however, that his conspiracy has been discovered, he stays away at the critical moment. For a time the two emissaries are successful with the people ; but the moment it becomes Artevelde's turn to speak, their intrigue begins to unravel. His harangue carries the people with him as a storm carries dead leaves. He reminds them of their past achievements, and of the remorseless cruelties practised on them by the earl. He demands who can know that his own name is not included among the three hundred to be delivered up to torments and death ; and at the moment that he finds himself the master of his audience he turns on the delegates, denounces them as traitors, and stabs Grutt to the heart, while Van den Bosch slays Bette.

The scabbard thrown away, the war-party is at once in the ascendant ; and the wealthy burghers are taught that their young chief has left his books, and become such a man of action as may not be trifled with. The Lord of Occo makes his escape, and succeeds also in carrying off Adriana, of whose broad lands he proposes to become the master by a forced marriage with the heiress. The scene changes to a

banqueting-hall at Bruges, where the Earl of Flanders is magnificently entertained by the mayor and citizens. There is a song on the approaching fall of Ghent—

Flat stones and awry, grass, potsherd, and shard,
Thy place shall be like an old churchyard !

The following brief conversation between D'Arlon and Gilbert Matthew, one of the earl's counsellors, is a graphic sketch of that stormy time—

Gilbert. No sooner had his highness reached the palace
Than he sends back for me.

D'Arlon. And me the same.

Gilbert. His highness is not happy.

D'Arlon. That is likely ;

But have you any private cause to think it ?

Gilbert. I have observed that when he is not happy
He sends for me.

D'Arlon. And do you mend his mood ?

Gilbert. Nay, what I can. His highness at such times
Is wishful to be counsell'd to shed blood.

D'Arlon. 'Tis said that he is counsell'd oft to that.

Gilbert. It is my duty to advise his highness
With neither fear nor favour. As I came,
The bodies of three citizens lay stretch'd
Upon the causeway.

D'Arlon. How had they been kill'd ?

Gilbert. By knocking on the head.

D'Arlon. And who had done it ?

Gilbert. The officers that walk'd before the Earl,
To make him room to pass. The streets were full,
And many of the mean-crafts roam'd about
Discoursing of the news they heard from Ghent ;
And as his highness pass'd they misbehaved,
And three were knock'd upon the head with staves.
I knew by that his highness was not happy.
I knew I should be sent for.

In such brief and interstitial scenes as the one

above quoted, the hand of a true master of dramatic art is seen as much as in passages of the most high-wrought pathos. Genius, even when not essentially dramatic, will often in the most interesting portions of a play produce what is so profound in sentiment or eloquent in expression, that in our enjoyment of it as poetry we forget to ask whether it be dramatic or not. True dramatic genius includes, besides a philosophic insight into character, a certain careless felicity in dealing with externals. This tact is a thing which we always find among our dramatists in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First, and which in our modern drama—the tradition having been broken—we almost always lack. The well may be deep and the water pure, but it is commonly without life. The soundest philosophic analysis will not serve as a substitute for a shrewd sharp observation, and that vividness of handling analogous to a hasty sketch by a great painter. This is the great defect of the German drama. Characters are sometimes ably conceived, and a plot is laboriously devised capable of illustrating them ; but the unconscious skill and imitative instinct which ought to mediate between the world of abstract conception and outward illustration is wanting. We miss the electric vitality of true art. The distinction is that between the drama taken from life and that drawn from books. England has long been the land of action, and Germany that of thought. In England, moreover, the drama grew up at a time when the passions expressed themselves freely, and when,

as among children and races in an early stage of development, the impulses were stronger from having never known restraint or disguise. In Germany the drama arose at a period of conventionalities and respectabilities as well as of theories. It was a philosophical imitation, not a living tradition; and with all its merits, it shares the defect of Germany's modern school of religious painters, in which the highest æsthetic science, directed by the noblest aims, cannot make up for the want of inspiration and of popular sympathy.

To proceed with our analysis of *Philip van Artevelde*. The Earl of Flanders is advised by Gilbert Matthew to starve Ghent into surrender; and he succeeds in cutting off all supplies from the place. Famine sets in, and pestilence follows. But the desperate situation suggests a desperate remedy. Artevelde proposes that five thousand of the bravest and strongest citizens should be supplied with what food still remains, and accompany him on a march to Bruges, the earl's capital. The small but resolute band arrive there a little before sunset. It is a festival; the inhabitants of Bruges have been making merry; and half of them rush out in a state of intoxication to encounter an enemy whom they despise. The setting sun shines in their faces; the archers of Ghent bewilder them with their arrows; the townspeople fall into an ambush; a total rout ensues. Artevelde enters Bruges with the flying troops, and the earl with difficulty escapes. Gilbert Matthew and the Lord of Occo are taken

prisoners, and immediately condemned to death ; and the First Part ends with the words,

Now, Adriana, I am wholly thine.

The Second Part has an interest graver and stronger yet. For a long period Artevelde has enjoyed unquestioned power ; but the storm breaks on him at last. The counsellors of the youthful King of France, alarmed by the outbreak of popular revolt in many parts of Europe, resolve to deprive the movement-party of the encouragement it derives from the success of the revolt in Flanders. The boy-king rejoices in the opportunity of proving his chivalry and aiding his exiled cousin. Artevelde sends Father John of Heda to England, in hopes of winning the alliance of Richard II. For him there has been a change worse than any political event can bring. His wife is dead, and his hearth has long been desolate. A change has taken place in his own character likewise ; and it is with a consummate art that the dramatist indicates the effect of time and success on such a character. He has grown more imperious and less scrupulous. Accustomed to see all men bow before him, his own will, guided mainly by considerations of public expediency, has been his main law of action. When warned by Father John that since his elevation he has not been unvisited by worldly pride and its attendant passions, he replies—

Say they so ?

Well, if it be so, it is late to mend,
For self-amendment is a work of time,

And business will not wait. Such as I am,
 For better or for worse, the world must take me,
 For I must hasten on. Perhaps the state
 And royal splendour I affect is deem'd
 A proof of pride ; yet they that these condemn
 Know little of the springs that move mankind.

If (which I own not)

I have drunk deeper of ambition's cup,
 Be it remember'd that the cup of love
 Was wrested from my hand. Enough of this.
 Ambition has its uses in the scheme
 Of Providence, whose instrument I am
 To work some changes in the world or die.

His thoughts are not as lofty nor his feelings as pure as they were, but he is as daring and as sagacious as ever. The King of France has sent a herald to require his immediate submission, the alternative being war. The French message is cast in the haughtiest language. Enthroned in his chair of state, and surrounded by his council, Artevelde flings back the defiance in a speech which, as an exponent of the revolutionary cause, has probably never been surpassed. There is in it nothing either of the daring speculation with which the cause of revolt is advocated by Shelley or of the declamatory cynicism of Byron. It is a practical business speech, raging itself into a white-heat, and still looking cold. In its domineering vindictiveness it is ever logical.

Artevelde. Sir Herald, thou hast well discharged thyself
 Of an ill function. Take these links of gold,
 And with the company of words I give thee
 Back to the braggart king from whom thou cam'st.
 First, of my father : had he lived to know
 His glories, deeds, and dignities postponed

To names of barons, earls, and counts (that here
 Are to men's ears importunately common
 As chimes to dwellers in the market-place)
 He with a silent and a bitter mirth
 Had listen'd to the boast ; may he his son
 Pardon for in comparison setting forth
 With his the name of this disconsolate earl !
 How stand they in the title-deeds of fame ?
 What hold and heritage in distant times
 Doth each enjoy—what posthumous possession ?
 The dusty chronicler with painful search
 Long fingering forgotten scrolls, indites
 That Louis Mâle was sometime Earl of Flanders,
 That Louis Mâle his sometime earldom lost,
 Through wrongs by him committed, that he lived
 An outcast long in dole not undeserved,
 And died dependent : there the history ends ;
 And who of them that hear it wastes a thought
 On the unfriended fate of Louis Mâle ?
 But turn the page and look we for the tale
 Of Artevelde's renown. What man was this ?
 He humbly born, he highly gifted, rose
 By steps of various enterprise, by skill,
 By native vigour, to wide sway, and took
 What his vain rival having could not keep.
 His glory shall not cease, though cloth-of-gold
 Wrap him no more ; for not of golden cloth,
 Nor fur, nor minever, his greatness came,
 Whose fortunes were inborn : strip me the two,—
 This were the humblest, that the noblest, beggar
 That ever braved a storm.

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 What then remains

But in the cause of nature to stand forth,
 And turn this frame of things the right side up ?
 For this the hour is come, the sword is drawn,
 And tell your masters vainly they resist.
 Nature that slept beneath their poisonous drugs
 Is up and stirring ; and from north and south,
 From east and west, from England and from France,
 From Germany and Flanders and Navarre,
 Shall stand against them like a beast at bay.
 The blood that they have shed will hide no longer

In the blood-sloken soil, but cries to heaven.
Their cruelties and wrongs against the poor
Shall quicken into swarms of venomous snakes,
And hiss through all the earth, till o'er the earth,
That ceases then from hissings and from groans,
Rises the song : How are the mighty fallen !
And by the peasant's hand ! Low lie the proud !
And smitten with the weapons of the poor—
The blacksmith's hammer and the woodman's axe.
Their tale is told : and for that they were rich,
And robb'd the poor ; and for that they were strong,
And scourged the weak ; and for that they made laws
Which turn'd the sweat of labour's brow to blood—
For these their sins the nations cast them out ;
The dunghills are their deathbeds, and the stench
From their uncover'd carrion steaming wide
Turns in the nostrils of enfranchised man
To a sweet savour. These things come to pass
From small beginnings, because God is just.

The love-story of Part II. is wholly unlike that of Part I. : and with it is closely connected the poetic justice of the play. The love is a lawless love, and conduces in a large degree to the fall of Artevelde and to his death. Between the two parts of the play a lyrical interlude is interposed, entitled the "Lay of Elena." It is a modified specimen of that poetry abounding in romantic sentiment, imagery, and figure, which, in the body of his work, Mr. Taylor has discarded. It records the fortunes of a beautiful Italian, who, after being betrayed and deserted, has lived for some time with the Duke de Bourbon, one of the French king's uncles, the object of a silly and selfish but passionate love on his part, which she has but scantily returned. Mortified at finding that his devotion to his mistress has made him an object of ridicule, the duke has

vented on her his spleen in many a caprice, and spoken of her in insulting terms. On the capture of a Flemish city, Elena has fallen into the hands of the Regent. He protects her, and places a safeguard at her disposal, in case she should wish to return to France. She is in no hurry to return. With all the energy of her wild and wilful nature, the imaginative and melancholy woman, who had looked on love but with self-reproach and despair, fixes her affections on the Regent, still with self-reproach, but no longer in despair. He can hardly be said to return such love as hers ; but he has wearied of unhappiness, and to love, as a social need, he is still accessible. But for this disastrous tie peace was still possible. The Duke of Bourbon has despatched Sir Fleureant of Heurlée to the Regent's camp with a request that he would send back Elena, and an implied promise that in return the king shall be prevented, through his influence, from going to war in defence of the Earl of Flanders.

The following lines are an extract from a scene in which the Regent describes his lost wife and his desolation. It is an illustration of Mr. Taylor's poetry in its more impassioned vein. The character of both the speakers is painted with a lavish hand, and the long and melancholy cadences of the metre echo the sadness of a new love which has grown up among omens of woe, and has too much self-reproach about it to promise, almost to desire, happiness. The scene displeases while it charms, and it instructs us while it displeases. Thus to have spoken of his wife to her

rival—a rival so unlike her in all save devotedness—is what Artevelde would have shrunk from, as we may imagine, in his youth. But his character is in decline; and neither love, nor the memory of love, wears for him any purer light than that of common day. He admires and he deplores the grace and goodness lost; but the “beautiful regards” turned back on him from the land of shadows do not trouble his heart—

Artevelde. She was a creature framed by love divine
For mortal love to muse a life away
In pondering her perfections; so unmoved
Amidst the world's contentions, if they touch'd
No vital chord nor troubled what she loved,
Philosophy might look her in the face,
And like a hermit stooping to the well
That yields him sweet refreshment, might therein
See but his own serenity reflected
With a more heavenly tenderness of hue!
Yet whilst the world's ambitious empty cares,
Its small disquietudes and insect-stings,
Disturb'd her never, she was one made up
Of feminine affections, and her life
Was one full stream of love from fount to sea.
These are but words.

Elena. My lord, they're full of meaning.

Artevelde. No, they mean nothing—that which they
would speak

Sinks into silence; 'tis what none can know
That knew not her—the silence of the grave—
Whence could I call her radiant beauty back,
It could not come more savouring of heaven
Than it went hence—the tomb received her charms
In their perfection, with nor trace of time
Nor stain of sin upon them; only death
Had turn'd them pale. I would that you had seen her
Living or dead.

Elena. I wish I had, my lord;

I should have loved to look upon her much ;
For I can gaze on beauty all day long,
And think the all-day long is but too short.

Artevelde. She was so fair that in the angelic choir
She will not need put on another shape
Than that she bore on earth. Well, well,—she's gone,
And I have tamed my sorrow. Pain and grief
Are transitory things no less than joy,
And though they leave us not the men we were,
Yet they do leave us. You behold me here
A man bereaved, with something of a blight
Upon the early blossoms of his life
And its first verdure, having not the less
A living root, and drawing from the earth
Its vital juices, from the air its powers :
And surely as man's health and strength are whole
His appetites regerminate, his heart
Reopens, and his objects and desires
Shoot up renew'd. What blank I found before me
From what is said you partly may surmise ;
How I have hoped to fill it, may I tell ?

Elena. I fear, my lord, that cannot be.

Artevelde.

Indeed !

Then am I doubly hopeless. What is gone,
Nor plaints, nor prayers, nor yearnings of the soul,
Nor memory's tricks, nor fancy's invocations—
Though tears went with them frequent as the rain
In dusk November, sighs more sadly breathed
Than winter's o'er the vegetable dead—
Can bring again ; and should this living hope,
That like a violet from the other's grave
Grew sweetly, in the tear-besprinkled soil
Finding moist nourishment—this seedling sprung
Where recent grief had like a ploughshare pass'd
Through the soft soul, and loosen'd its affections—
Should this new-blossom'd hope be coldly nipp'd,
Then were I desolate indeed ! . . .

Elena. I said I fear'd another could not fill
The place of her you lost, being so fair
And perfect as you give her out. . . .
I cannot give you what you've had so long ;
Nor need I tell you what you know so well.
I must be gone.

The Regent, on her departure, falls into the following soliloquy, to explain the latter part of which, it is necessary to premise that the criminals sentenced are Flemings detected in carrying on, at the instigation of Sir Fleureant, a correspondence between some of the Flemish cities and France—

Artevelde [after a pause]. The night is far advanced upon the morrow,

And but for that conglomerated mass
Of cloud with ragged edges, like a mound,
Or black pine-forest on a mountain's top,
Wherein the light lies ambush'd, dawn were near—
Yes, I have wasted half a summer's night.
Was it well spent? Successfully it was.

Ho, Nieuverkerchen!—When we think upon it,
How little flattering is a woman's love!
Given commonly to whosoe'er is nearest
And propp'd with most advantage; outward grace
Nor inward light is needful; day by day
Men wanting both are mated with the best
And loftiest of God's feminine creation,
Whose love takes no distinction but of gender,
And ridicules the very name of choice.
Ho, Nieuverkerchen! What then, do we sleep?
Are none of you awake?—and as for me,
The world says Philip is a famous man.—
What is there women will not love, so taught?—
Ho, Ellert! by your leave, though, you must wake.

Enter an Officer.

Have me a gallows built upon the mount,
And let Van Kortz be hung at break of day.
No news of Bulsen or Van Muck?

Officer.

My lord,

Bulsen is taken; but Van Muck, we fear,
Has got clean off.

Artevelde.

Let Bulsen too be hung.

This is certainly an extraordinary termination for a

love-scene ; yet it is not more daring and original than it is in character. It is not such love as Artevelde's that expands the heart, nor such success that satisfies even self-love. His affection proceeds neither from the highest nor the lowest portion of man's nature, but from that social instinct, in mature life, perhaps the strongest of our impulses, which makes men shrink from isolation, whether it be the isolation of the waste, or of the crowd. Artevelde has found no obstacle to contend with ; and this social instinct being already in some sort appeased by the sympathy which has so readily met his advances, it is not inconsistent with his character that he should wreak upon others some portion of the dissatisfaction which he feels with himself.

The poetic merit of the scene none can doubt. A gray and vapoury atmosphere of suppressed sorrow hangs over the whole ; and there is a "whispering sweetness" in the majestic and melancholy flow of its rhythmic cadences as they sweep under the willows of desponding thoughts. The poem is remarkable throughout for its metre, which cannot be surpassed in force, variety, harmony, and dramatic significance. This scene may also be taken as an illustration of Mr. Taylor's peculiar vein of deep and earnest pathos. His is not the poetry which contents itself with raking superficially the loose soil of the affections. He ploughs deeply, and turns up a substratum of human feeling not often revealed to light in the merely descriptive drama so common in modern times.

Depth and truthfulness of dramatic feeling can only be found where the work is in reality, as well as in arbitrary construction, dramatic; that is, where character and action are alike evolved out of the depths of humanity by the true dramatic genius, and embodied in practical exhibition by that peculiar and instinctive tact which constitutes the dramatic talent. Where, instead of this process of evolution and embodying, we find merely a process of philosophical or poetical Description, the dramatic form of composition fails to impart pathos, because it fails to convey an impression of reality: a close affinity to life is professed, and the pledge is not redeemed.

From this time nothing succeeds in the Flemish camp. Everything appears to fulfil the threat of Father John—

After strange women them that went astray
God never prosper'd in the olden time,
Nor will He bless them now.

Van den Bosch, the ablest of Artevelde's lieutenants, is defeated, and receives a mortal wound. Many of the Flemish towns transfer their allegiance to their former lord; and even the name of Artevelde no longer carries its old magic,—a rumour having gone abroad that sorcery has subjected him to the spells of a French spy. The English king sends no aid: no hope remains but in a successful battle. Gathering together all his forces, Artevelde marches to the eastern bank of the lower Lis, to meet the French army and prevent them from passing the river. At

a very early hour in the morning he leaves his tent—

Artevelde. The gibbous moon was in a wan decline,
And all was silent as a sick man's chamber.
Mixing its small beginnings with the dregs
Of the pale moonshine and a few faint stars,
The cold uncomfortable daylight dawn'd ;
And the white tents topping a low ground-fog
Show'd like a fleet becalm'd. I wander'd far,
Till reaching to the bridge I sate me down
Upon the parapet. Much mused I there,
Revolving many a passage of my life,
And the strange destiny that lifted me
To be the leader of a mighty host,
And terrible to kings.

There he has had a vision of his dead wife. He thus describes it to Elena—

She appear'd
In white, as when I saw her last, laid out
After her death ; suspended in the air
She seem'd, and o'er her breast her arms were cross'd ;
Her feet were drawn together, pointing downwards,
And rigid was her form and motionless.
From near her heart, as if the source were there,
A stain of blood went wavering to her feet.
So she remain'd, inflexible as stone,
And I as fixedly regarding her.
Then suddenly, and in a line oblique,
Thy figure darted past her ; whereupon,
Though rigid still and straight, she downward moved ;
And as she pierced the river with her feet,
Descending steadily, the streak of blood
Peel'd off upon the water, which, as she vanish'd,
Appear'd all blood, and swell'd and welter'd sore ;
And midmost in the eddy and the whirl
My own face saw I, which was pale and calm
As death could make it :—Then the vision pass'd,
And I perceived the river and the bridge,
The mottled sky and horizontal moon,
The distant camp, and all things as they were.

Before the battle begins Artevelde is informed that a foreign knight, with his visor closed, demands to see him. It is Sir Fleureant of Heurlée. On his former visit to the camp, when detected in a treasonable correspondence, he had been condemned to death; but his life had been spared at Elena's fatal intercession. He had broken his parole, escaped to the French camp, and there—half in despair and half in ambition—engaged himself to assassinate the Regent. While Artevelde is passing the bridge of the vision he is stabbed by the false knight. For a time he conceals his wound, and the battle rages with various fortune. His hosts are at last driven back in confusion; and Artevelde, making a desperate effort to rally them, is swept back towards the fatal bridge, and suffocated in the crowd, the bridge giving way.

In the last scene Elena kneels on the bloody battlefield beside the body of Artevelde; while Van Ryk, an old Flemish captain, stands at the other side. He urges her to flight; but she refuses to depart without the body. The Duke of Burgundy then appears, and Sir Fleureant approaches the group as the young king and his royal uncles gather around the body, and clumsily endeavours to vindicate the fair fame of Elena. She leaps to her feet, and snatching Artevelde's dagger, strikes it through the heart of his murderer. The guards rush in; and in the attempt to take her and Van Ryk prisoners, both are slain. The Duke of Bourbon gives orders that Elena shall receive Christian burial, but that the body of Artevelde shall be

hung upon a tree, in the sight of the army. The Duke of Burgundy refuses to war with the dead—

Burgundy.

Brother, no ;

It were not for our honour, nor the king's,
To use it so. Dire rebel though he was,
Yet with a noble nature and great gifts
Was he endow'd,—courage, discretion, wit ;
An equal temper, and an ample soul,
Rock-bound and fortified against assaults
Of transitory passion, but below
Built on a surging subterranean fire,
That stirr'd and lifted him to high attempts.
So prompt and capable, and yet so calm,
He nothing lack'd in sovereignty but the right,
Nothing in soldiership except good fortune.
Wherefore, with honour lay him in his grave,
And thereby shall increase of honour come
Unto their arms who vanquish'd one so wise,
So valiant, so renown'd. Sirs, pass we on,
And let the bodies follow us on biers.
Wolf of the weald and yellow-footed kite,
Enough is spread for you of meaner prey ;
Other interment than your maws afford
Is due to these. At Courtray we shall sleep,
And there I'll see them buried side by side.

VI

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE

PART II

WERE a critic to describe *Philip van Artevelde* in one word, he might say it was a solid work. In its extreme thoughtfulness it preserves the better characteristics of our age; but those who have only been in the habit of reading poetry as a trivial amusement, or a relaxation from study, and who are only familiar with works produced to gratify the taste of the moment, to stimulate the jaded appetite, to flatter an abject love of the mere ornaments of poetry, or an effeminate dependence on its sensual part,—all those persons must have at first felt surprised at finding themselves confronted with a work so substantial in its materials, so manly in its structure, so severe in its style, and so gravely impressive in spirit and general tendency, as this remarkable work. It is full of the philosophy of practical life; and in this respect it is analogous to many productions of an age which has occupied itself with the philosophy of all subjects. It is,

however, full also of practical life itself, not exhibited merely with reference to its picturesque peculiarities, or swathed in the folds of a costume which hides the limbs beneath it, and renders motion next to impossible, but life considered in relation to the business of life, and illustrated by pictures taken from the broad highways of life. It is full, too, of action. Properly speaking, we have had but little of action, though abundance of movement, in modern poetry. Convulsion is not action. The mere resistance to violent passion is more worthy of the name of action than the paroxysms of unrestrained energies, stimulated only from without. Genuine action proceeds from the will, and therefore true active energy implies something of self-control and self-government, as well as of impulse. Such is the action which we find in the world among men qualified to effect anything great, and such is the action in which this poem abounds.

Some have spoken of Artevelde's character as one representing the balanced union of the contemplative and practical powers. This is not a correct estimate of it; and such a character would seem rather to embody an abstract and arbitrary conception of excellence than to have been taken from human nature. Among the many different sorts of ideal to which human characters, like human faces, may be referred, no single one can be found in actual life which so unites the opposite excellences of our nature, that it can be considered paramount over all the others, and itself the great central type of humanity. Human

society is ministered to by men possessed of very various gifts : each man, however superior he may be to others in some respects, is inferior in others ; and the whole body is bound together in harmony by this very inequality, which makes every man stand in need of his neighbour, while each is himself needed in his place. If particular persons were not more amply endowed with the contemplative than the practical powers, truth would grow to be valued merely in proportion as the discovery of it ministered to action ; an error, however specious, not less unphilosophical than would be the converse one of valuing action only as it seasons wisdom with experience. Human life, in fact, is the meeting point of many and infinite necessities and powers, by us imperfectly apprehended. To subordinate one of these to another, would be as fatal a mistake as to subordinate one virtue to another, truth to charity, or mercy to justice :—the excellency so degraded would virtually be reduced from the infinite to the finite. From this evil, society is preserved by a diversity of gifts, which makes it natural to particular persons to appreciate particular objects more than others, and to follow out to the utmost the different pursuits of life. Great men, it is true, unite faculties seldom found in conjunction ; but these are seldom the faculties conversely opposed to each other, and the union effected never amounts to anything like an exact balance. Artevelde is, perhaps, in the main a character of intellect, but his mental faculties are by no means those which are the “ harmonious opposites ”

of the practical energies. He seldom touches on abstract subjects. We find in him no tendency to *à priori* views of things, and he is fonder of exercising his understanding than his reason. He has no inclination to metaphysical philosophy, though in an unusual degree a deliberate, thoughtful, grave-hearted man. He is a keen observer, and possesses in an equal degree the faculty of reflection. He looks things boldly in the face, sees them clearly and sedately, judges of them with a prompt accuracy, and acts vigorously. His temperament is calm, but not cold, though abounding more with suppressed than expressed feeling. He is solidly passionate to a degree of which more tumultuous natures are incapable; natures which boil over so quickly, that they cannot take in much heat. His moral being is deep, though not wide; and though not ungenerous, he has that abiding feeling of self which generally clings to strong substantive characters who have not devoted themselves to some noble cause which lifts them above themselves. On the whole, though with many grave defects, his is a character built upon the heroic mould, and eminently qualified by its strength to resist the shocks that invest a character with tragic interest, while he is neither so lofty or so pure as to prevent our discerning in his adversities that poetic justice which bears so important a part in tragedy. Above all, Artevelde's is an efficient character. The sailing of a vessel depends as much upon its trim as its build; and there is a certain delicate equipoise of the human

powers which, in measuring the individual's chances of success, require at least as much to be taken into account as the magnitude of those powers. The qualities of understanding and will, which form the basis of Artevelde's character, harmonise so well with his moral nature, and are so aptly supported by his robust temperament, that their collective weight exceeds immeasurably that which they would possess if less perfectly united.

To estimate the work accurately we must bear in mind that *Philip van Artevelde* is, properly speaking, what it calls itself, a "dramatic romance," not a drama; and it is not a little remarkable that poetry so different in its substance from that to which we have recently been accustomed, should have been presented to us in a form which, though long used in Germany, is original in our literature. It is interesting to observe the attempts made in an undramatic age to push out, in different directions, the old limits of the tragic art, so as to suit the genius of modern times. In Goethe's *Faust* we are presented with a mass of metaphysical and psychological reveries embodied in a dramatic form: the present work employs the same form, on a scale scarcely less large, to embody a philosophy more in harmony with the practical character of the English mind. If the abstruse and speculative tragedy of Hamlet be regarded as in some sort the type upon which the former work was modelled, the scheme of the latter may be considered an expansion of the chronicle drama of Shakespeare.

This Dramatic Romance differs from the Historical Drama, much as the Historical Drama differs from pure Tragedy:—on the one hand, it has less of compactness; on the other, its scope is wider. There are persons who regard the drama written for the study as a literary monster. Scenic representation is undoubtedly one end of the drama, but it is by no means the sole end; nay, it will be confessed, that while the powers of a great actor give additional force to the passionate parts of a play, the more purely poetic portions lose much at the same time by the vulgarising associations of the stage.

It is true that the greatest tragedies have ever been, inclusively, acting plays; but it is true, not less, that if we would do justice to the highest tragedies of Shakespeare, considered in their highest relations, the stage on which they are performed must be that of the meditative mind, and the imagination alone must play all the parts. The acting drama is in fact a compromise: it foregoes somewhat of dignity, that it may gain in vividness. The drama for the study is a compromise also; it relinquishes the animation produced by stage effect and popular sympathy, in order to gain an ampler and serener field for pure poetry. Something of loss seems a necessary condition of development, in all the arts. Painting possesses a wider scope than sculpture, but this advantage it gains by a sacrifice of certain other advantages connected with the uses of the solid material. The art of drawing in *chiaroscuro* is

capable of embodying, though with less vividness, a wider range of conceptions than the art of painting; and no one who has studied Flaxman's illustrations of Dante can doubt that, the advantages derived from colour being once resigned, the art of designing in light and shade alone, on a large scale, might, to an indefinite extent, enlarge its sphere and embrace a more various detail of interest, supposing it first to shake off those restricted laws of pictorial composition necessary only for the balance of colours, and to work on that wider law suited to itself, which hitherto it has felt after but not found. Applying to the drama this general law of compensation and compromise, it seems by no means unreasonable in one who rejects the advantages connected with stage-representation to get rid also of such restrictions, connected with the ordinary structure of a play, as limit or embarrass him; so he forget not that a writer may have too much room as well as too little, and that a certain degree of mechanical restraint and opposition is needful for the development of the powers. In modifying the design of a work it will generally be necessary to modify its structure also; indeed, there is no blunder more common than that of altering parts of a system without altering other corresponding parts, the result of which is ever the creation of a fabric equivocal and heterogeneous. In many respects the dramatic has advantages over all other kinds of composition; every species of poetic beauty is capable of being introduced into it; and the various

modifications of which it is susceptible, corresponding with the time, the writer, or the matter he has to work up, have possibly not even yet been exhausted.

The ample compass of Mr. Taylor's work will, of course, not meet the approbation of those who censure the ordinary romantic drama for its disregard of the unities. Few blunders seem more singular than that of those critics who, attaching themselves to names, not things, have thus applied the rules of the ancient tragedy to the modern romantic drama. That the modern, as well as the ancient, drama requires a certain unity of plot, is obvious, since without unity no work of art whatever can possess completeness or proportion. But the question is, as to the kind of unity; and if we investigate the question, by making that induction from the best specimens of the modern stage, which guided Aristotle in his principles with regard to the ancient, we shall discover that the unity of plot required by the romantic drama differs as much from that required by the classical, as an organic whole differs from a plastic whole; as a tree whose branches, however tortured by the storm, are nourished by one root, and converge towards one stem, differs from a statue. Observe the difference between the character of Grecian and of Gothic architecture. The finite character of the former is essential to the definiteness of its proportions; while its simple and regular features conduce to one general effect, that of precision and completeness. In Gothic architecture, on the other hand, the re-

lation of part to part, though not less real, is far more remote. We gaze upon the aspiring lines, to look beyond them: we connect gable with pinnacle, and the high roof with tower and spire, by the imagination; and it may be said that half of the mysterious fabric we contemplate is invisible to the eye of sense, and embodied only to that of the mind. So it is in the classical and romantic drama. The character of the former is its definiteness; that of the latter its suggestiveness: and while in the larger plot of the latter all the various interests must indirectly be made to converge upon one great central interest, they are, notwithstanding, united by a far less visible bond than that which cements the unity of the classical tragedy, and the completeness resulting is of a far less obvious character. Majesty was the chief excellency of the Greek drama; philosophic depth, of the romantic; and it is obvious that, for the former, simplicity of plot was necessary; for the latter, variety. The true subject of every modern play is man,—man considered not as a mere part of nature, but as a creature of soul affections and of reason. The action of the play must proceed from the characters, and is successful so far as it illustrates them; and the catastrophe ought to set forth some problem of our many-sided humanity.

The genius of the Greek play, on the contrary, was, like all the Greek literature, eminently objective; so much so, that (every external object necessarily supposing the coexistence of a being to contemplate it)

the chorus, which remained ever on the stage, represented the spectators, and embodied the principle of public opinion in the Odes and gnomic sentiments that served as a commentary on the scene. A single strongly marked character was sufficient to give interest to the action : and all that was necessary for the plot was, that it should describe an event splendid and poetical in itself, and, if possible, closed by some supernatural interposition. It followed, therefore, that the merit of the plot not consisting in the connection between events and their remoter moral causes, but in the closeness with which event followed event, the narrowest limits as to time and place must give the strictest and most forcible sequence to the progress of those events. The modern drama, on the other hand, requires, on the very same principle, a very wide limit as to time and place, because the passions mature themselves by degrees ; character requires a considerable period for its development ; and it is only by a comprehensive survey that we are enabled to appreciate the inward and philosophical relation of outward events to their several ultimate sources in the heart of man. Nor need we attach any importance to the objection that change of place and the lapse of a long period are inconsistent with dramatic illusion. The fact is stronger than the theory ; and, in this instance, the fact can be easily accounted for. The only illusion that takes place in any case is one of the imagination, not the senses ; and that illusion is voluntary, not involuntary. In witnessing a drama, or looking at a

picture, the mind of the spectator is not merely open to the reception of passive impressions ; a large part of the pleasure which he feels consists in the sympathetic exertion of his own creative faculties in the same direction as they have been exerted by the dramatic writer or the artist. This may be one reason why it gives us pleasure to read of events which it would give us pain to witness in real life ; why we are dissatisfied with a portrait, which, instead of having a suggestive likeness to the original, possesses the literal likeness of a caricature, allowing no room for the imagination of the beholder ; and generally why, in every work of imitative art, a diversity from nature, as well as a resemblance to nature, is necessary for our satisfaction.

In Part the Second, Philip van Artevelde is presented to us again, after the lapse of a long period. He has become Regent of Flanders, and, as such, has lived in something of royal state, though encompassed with the toils of the warrior, as well as the cares of the statesman. In Part the First, he ponders long before accepting from the Lady Adriana a love which might possibly involve her in the troubles of the time : in Part the Second, he has no hesitation in seeking that of Elena, though his fortunes are in a yet more desperate state. In youth, his aspirations after an excellence superior to his own are marked by his love for one whose charm consisted in her exquisite freshness, purity, tender and self-forgetting fidelity. In mature age, his love is not higher than himself—a sign of a character in decay. Elena is a character of

wayward impulses, fervent imagination, and melancholy passion. The better part of her nature has had but little opportunity of development, for she has long been a stranger to self-approval. She is reckless, and has lived for years in that state of modified despair, which, if to have neither peace nor hope be despair, is no uncommon disease. Her sadness has become part of her being; nor is it without a shadowy voluptuousness, like the gloom of an overcast day in a soft climate. Something of her character will be conveyed to the reader by the following songs—

Down lay in a nook my lady's brach,
And said my feet are sore,
I cannot follow with the pack
A hunting of the boar.

And though the horn sounds never so clear
With the hounds in loud uproar,
Yet I must stop and lie down here,
Because my feet are sore.

The huntsman when he heard the same,
What answer did he give?
The dog that's lame is much to blame,
He is not fit to live.¹

On a later occasion it is thus she sings—

Quoth tongue of neither maid nor wife
To heart of neither wife nor maid,
Lead we not here a jolly life
Betwixt the shine and shade?

Quoth heart of neither maid nor wife
To tongue of neither wife nor maid,
Thou wag'st, but I am worn with strife,
And feel like flowers that fade.

¹ *Philip van Artevelde*, p. 177.

Artevelde tells Elena that Time brings healing and renovation to the bereft ; but neither of them has found this to be true. In comparing the character of Artevelde with Lord Byron's conception of a hero, we noted first its better side : it had, however (as every dramatic character must have), its worst side also ; and even Lord Byron's hero is scarcely more of the earth earthly, than the solid and manly, yet wholly pagan, character which imparts its philosophic interest to the work before us. It is true that he has occasionally speculations concerning objects above this visible diurnal sphere, but he quickly dismisses such impertinent visitations as "conclusions inconclusive." It is plain that he habitually associates the material with the substantial, and connects his idea of reality with those visible objects which are, in fact, unreal when compared with the intuitions of pure reason, the mandates of the moral sense, or the truths of revelation, and which, but for the sensations of pleasure or pain which give them a reality to the senses, could not be regarded as less fantastic than the more fleeting visions of a dream. The great difference between Mr. Taylor's and Lord Byron's conceptions of the heroic character is, that in Mr. Taylor's the regulative principle is within, and there is a concentration of the vital functions and purposes, qualities in which Lord Byron's characters are deficient. Considered, then, in relation to that which is within, and that which is around, the one ideal differs from the other as the animal structure differs from the vegetable, and the

higher class of animals from the lower ; but judged by their relation to things above, they stand on the same level. In both we find more of that earth out of which man was made, and to which the man-animal returns, than of that spirit which was breathed into the mortal clay, and by that union constituted our humanity. Both alike are defective when weighed in the balance of one of the most thoughtful of our early poets, Daniel—

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man !

Self-inclusion and self-dependence constitute the original and persistent error of Artevelde's nature, the vulnerable point, without which no character can be truly dramatic. Magnanimity, his wise preceptor tells him, in a passage otherwise admirable, "*reposes, self-included,*" at the mountain's base ; and something of this erroneous ideal he seems to have laboured under on his way to the mountain's top. "Men, in their places, are the men that stand," is one of his maxims. In another passage it is thus that he describes the object of his veneration—

All my life long
I have beheld with most respect the man
Who knew himself, and knew the ways before him,
And, from amongst them, chose considerately,
With a clear foresight—not a blindfold courage—
And having chosen, with a steadfast mind
Pursued his purposes.

Vigour of will, deliberation, consistent action, these he revered : but, as he shows but little thought of that

ultimate aim without which all action is worthless, so he exhibits but little reverence for that moral law, without which all human deliberation lacks its measure, and that Will Supreme, in submission to which all finite and relative wills find their only possible freedom. To act efficiently is more his aim than to act rightly; and his justice is often rather judgment than justice. The cause to which Artevelde allied himself, whether just or not, seems to have been taken up with little reference to its justice. At the declining period of his fortunes, when, as he with characteristic dryness remarks, he is "driven upon his friends," he is driven upon his principles also; but among his deliberations when choosing his side, he gives no indication of doing so in obedience to political justice or patriotic enthusiasm. Self-respect—that clay foundation of false virtue, which supports, and so often finally engulfs, characters neither built on the rock, nor yet on the sand—has been with Artevelde, not merely a regulative principle, but the basis of his whole being. In delineating the effect which time and success produce on such a moral frame, Mr. Taylor has read us a lesson as important as dramatist ever yet conveyed.

There is one difficulty under which painters and poets alike labour, that of uniting two qualities essentially different, but each of which in its degree is necessary for the sister arts. The qualities alluded to are those of ideal beauty and characteristic physiognomy. A great painter must be habitually

impressed with that abstract image of human beauty ; but he must also possess a keen appreciation of **all the** actual varieties of individual expression. **These two** gifts are obviously antagonistic to each other, and the difficulty thence arising, is one of the disadvantages under which those painters labour who live among the less beautiful races of mankind. By nothing else were the different schools of art more distinguished than by the mode in which these gifts were apportioned among them. Raffaele possessed them both to an extraordinary degree, but in him the love of ideal beauty prevailed ; and Lavater observes, that while in gesture he exhibits an unrivalled command of physiognomic expression, in his faces the abstract conception of beauty reigns supreme. The poet is in the same dilemma. According as the abstract faculty or that of observation predominates, his portraitures will gain in ideality or individuality. His task is to adjust the balance. In the present instance, if somewhat more of chivalrous elevation and nobleness had entered into the characters delineated, the picture would have been at once more delightful and more true to the age delineated.

In distinctness of individuality Mr. Taylor's characters are admirable. Nothing can be more different than the staid, deliberate courage of Artevelde, and the impetuous courage of Van den Bosch, the reckless courage of Sir Fleureant, and the sanguine courage of D'Arlon. Nothing can be more clearly discriminated than the cloistral wisdom of Father John, as compared

with the worldly wisdom of Gilbert Matthew, which, again, differs materially from the official craft of Tristram of Lestovet. In real life, no quality, be it virtue or vice, is ever the same in any two persons, though it must bear the same name. In the clumsy delineations of character, so frequent in modern literature, this truth seems often wholly lost sight of. The character of Van den Bosch is especially worthy of attention; it is a peculiar, though not a far-fetched or ambitious conception, and through both parts of the play it is maintained with admirable consistency. Fierce, frank, and hardy, shrewd without wisdom, faithful without principle, and roughly kind without affection, he is an instructive example of the animal man. His restless energies are compassed by a narrow limit; but within that limit he fulfils his functions with an animal efficiency, undisturbed by vanity, embarrassment, or infirmity. He is not deficient in ability; yet, though a man of keen-witted passions, he has, properly speaking, no mind: as in animals, his attribute of thought is a part of his instincts, not a distinct faculty, capable of contemplating separately the inferior part of his nature, and, if necessary, of withstanding it. He converses only with things in the concrete; a sensuous image hangs about all his thoughts, and an abstract conception would be to him as hard an achievement as a moral sentiment. His intellect floats upon the current of his blood; and in the last scene of his life, as his blood flows away through his opening wounds, his passion and

his reason are drained off together ; while, incensed at death, not appalled by it, he submits to extinction as a necessity more painful, but to him not less natural, than sleep.

Its solidity, the especial merit of Philip van Artevelde, may deprive it of the sympathy of those who are attached to a certain "Art-Heresy" not uncommon, that is of those ultra-artistic critics of the German school, who regard the imagination as the one great poetic faculty, disregarding the relations between it and the moral and intellectual faculties at large, at the same time that they scornfully deny its dependence on that world of nature, the interpretation of which is one of the Poet's chief functions. According to the views of these critics, the poet neither comes forward as the representative of a moral faith nor as a servant of Nature: the prophet that "cometh in his own name" is the only prophet whom they will receive. They regard Poetry simply as an art, and imagine that if the artist have impressed upon his work a felicitous form, it matters little what is the substance thus adroitly moulded. Such persons regard versatility and address as the chief poetic gifts after imagination, and it will easily be granted that fixedness of principles or definitiveness of views are little needed if the merit of the poem be estimated merely by the superficial beauty of its proportions. But poetry, though an art, is more than an art, and forms of beauty, if indeed they could be shaped out of a fluent material instead of the everlasting marble, would be worthless as bubbles.

Poetry must have a vital principle. Shakespeare, not only our greatest poet, but also, notwithstanding his careless spontaneity, our deepest artist, tells us that "There is no art, but nature makes that art." The earth on which we dwell is a star also ; nor is a flower less a work of art because it is a product of Nature—a word which Nature has put forth, and which hangs suspended on Nature's sustaining breath. Again, poetry has its relations with moral science as well as with life, and the highest beauty is connected, directly or indirectly, with those deep immutable truths, which, however wide the compass they describe, have their anchorage in the lowly ground of veracity and fact. Once more, poetry has its relations with the constitution and progress of the writer's individual being, and therefore supposes reality of being. There are persons who can only speak, nay, who can only think, by fancying themselves to be somebody else, and converting their real position into an imaginary one, in order that, by a reflex action of the mind, they may play the actor's part, and convert their imaginary position back into a real one. These persons may be artists, but they are not poets. There are thoughts which, without being truly born of the mind, pass through it merely as bricks through the mould ; thoughts by which, no matter how striking or how copious, a great mind is no more built up than a bricklayer's mould is converted into a house when it has turned out bricks enough to build a house. Such are not the thoughts which form the substance of a great poem. They may

be its ornaments, but the principle, *materiam superabat opus*, is a dangerous one to those who have learned the graces and perfections of an art before they have mastered its substance. Every true poem must be a genuine growth from the poet's own mind, partaking of its essence, nay, of its accidents: it must possess a reality as well as a consistency; the sweet singer must be more than a musical ventriloquist; and the poet (to reply to the question of the clown, "Is poetry an honest thing?") must be a true man. There must be a keynote for all his varieties, a focal point to determine his most eccentric wanderings: he must acknowledge a law, even in fluctuation, unchangeable postulates, to which the most apparently opposite dicta can be referred: in a word, the poet, with all his pliability, must be able also to stand firm and hold fast: he must maintain a faith of his own, and have the courage to throw himself upon it as an element which will support him. "I believed, and therefore I spake," will ever form part of a poet's credentials, whether his song be secular or sacred. Without sincerity poetry can have no genuine passion; without objective truth its most advanced speculations will be but progress in a wrong direction; without something of moral orthodoxy its merits, alike of an intellectual and imaginative sort, will be "mere Fibulæ without a zone to clasp."

Such works as *Philip van Artevelde* are the best corrective for the insidious error referred to above. It is not one of those poems which bear witness to no

faculty except the imagination—a faculty which never can grow to a goodly stature if it has nothing to feed on but itself. Those who have exclusively addicted themselves to a poetry rather artificial than truly artistic may be disposed to complain of the poem in this respect, and assert that the vine has been allowed to make too much wood. But a sound poetic imagination, like a wise sovereign, contents itself with a moderate “mensal demesne,” provided that its sceptre be acknowledged over its whole kingdom. It does not rule alone and arbitrarily, but works with, and harmonises the various powers of a comprehensive mind, maturated by the strongest mental aliments. What are those aliments? From art, from study, from the outward face of Nature, the poet will gather much with which to store his imagination; but the main part of a poet’s training consists not in that which most stimulates a single faculty, but that which most tends to invigorate his whole mind; in other words, the acquired influences, of which we shall find the strongest traces, will be those derived from sagacious reflection and the experience of human life. There is a close affinity between the two, for reality of thought is ever connected with sympathy for the realities of life. Brilliant descriptions of Nature may be thrown off by a *tour de force*, but habitual observation is necessary in order that descriptive poetry should be true. In like manner, without a consistent *method* of thought, the subtlest reflections will fail to impart that moral ethos without which no poem can be of first-rate

excellence. It is possible, without plagiarism, to produce poetry which is evidently rather distilled from other poetry than drawn from the living fountain either of mind or of Nature. Mr. Taylor's poetry plainly taken from life, not from books, least of from books of poetry: and to this circumstance is doubtless owing at once its soundness and its freshness.

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